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# STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 3

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# The Editor's Page

It was either in 1933 or early 1934 that I saw a trailer for a movie entitled, *Meet Nero Wolfe*, starring one of my favorite actors, Edward Arnold, as the detective. I missed that film, but late in 1934, I believe it was, I caught the second movie, *The League of Frightened Men*, with Walter Connally as Wolfe. So my interest in Nero Wolfe was aroused in the period when I was reading Agatha Christie, S.S. Van Dine, and G.K. Chesterton, in addition to Conan Doyle; but I actually did not read my first Nero Wolfe novel until early in the 50's: that was *Murder by the Book*, and that was enough to hook me.

Mr. Stout claims that Lionel Stander, though a fine actor, was badly miscast as Archie Goodwin, but I haven't seen him quoted in relation to either Edward Arnold or Walter Connally. I was assured by the elect, before reading confirmed it, that Connally had been frightfully miscast — no resemblance whatever — and it may be that Arnold wasn't right, either. I can't say for sure; but except for the full matter of girth, I still see Wolfe as resembling Arnold. Edward Arnold's face and voice have always seemed to me to be exactly right for Wolfe. Just who could play Archie, is another matter. In one of the novels, Goodwin himself says he resembles the young Humphrey Bogart more than any other film actor; well, perhaps... About the only thing I now recall with any pleasure in that movie version of *The League of Frightened Men* is that reading the book confirmed my admiration for Eduardo Cianelli's portrayal of Paul

Chapin; and if memory serves me right, it was Walter Kingford who was "the most ridiculous murderer I have ever met", to use Wolfe's words. All of these film actors are no longer with us.

I've heard suggestions about another departed star, who might have played Wolfe: Sydney Greenstreet. He had the girth, true, but there was a soft quality about him as well as his voice, that, to my way of seeing, would have disqualified him for Wolfe. He was superb in *The Maltese Falcon*, and *Mask of Demetrios*, and *Three Strangers* — but the parts fit his qualities splendidly. Nor would Laird Cregar have been right, either, I'd say.

The late William S. Baring-Gould, author of *Sherlock Homes of Baker Street*, and annotator of *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, among other works treasurable, brought forth *Nero Wolfe of West Thirty-Fifth Street* in 1969, and the book is now available in soft covers from Bantam, in the same format as their other Nero Wolfe volumes (they are the soft-cover publishers of most of NW). Mr. Gould has not left me so much to say I as I might like, but he says it so well that I cheerfully forgive him (not to mention what he has to say that I wouldn't have thought of).

It is Mr. Gould's thesis that, after Sherlock Homes' supposed death on May 4, 1891, at the hands of Professor Moriarty, he went to Montenegro and there, under the name of Sigerson, met the woman (who Sherlockians agree was Irene Adler — there being nothing in the Canon to contradict Watson's assertion to this effect in

*A Scandal in Bohemia*). Their son was born late in 1892, when Irene was in New Jersey, near Hoboken.

Needless to say, while some (perhaps many) Sherlockians go along with this happily, some (perhaps many) do not. At least one prominent member of the Scandalous Bohemians of New Jersey finds the thesis offensive, to say the very least; and, of course, one has to work terribly hard to find evidence in the Canon. Nearly all the clues come from the typewriter of Archie Goodwin.

In a former essay, I made the rash statement that Philo Vance was the only fictional detective of real prominence who is presented under a pseudonym, and was promptly challenged by a reader who was going on memory, but was sure that the same applies to Ellery Queen. I haven't seen a copy of *The Roman Hat Mystery* around (though, truth to tell, I haven't looked awfully hard), so cannot be sure — but I'll give the reader the benefit of any doubt. However, in this instance to hand, I see that Nero Wolfe is sufficient to falsify my statement: Philo Vance may have been the first, but cannot be considered the only fictional detective in a series of stories wherein we are made aware that he is not being presented under his real name. Van Dine told us directly in a forward, and apparently that was the case also with the Ellery Queen series. Here, in Rex Stout's series, it comes through in bits and snatches through the 31 novels and the 13 collections of novelets that run three to a volume for the most part.

I've read or re-read all of the novels, but have missed some of the novelet collections. No matter, though; I have enough to work on, although there is always that nagging thought that a crucial clue — one which might well change or at least modify an opinion — may be in one or more of those novelets I still haven't seen. *Death of a Dude*, the latest novel to appear in soft covers, came to my attention shortly after

finishing the first draft of this commentary, and required me to modify some opinions. *The Doorbell Rang*, which I couldn't find in soft cover, just turned up recently on a remainder counter — ah, the injustice! — and while I cannot agree with those who claim it is the best of the entire series, it certainly has some of Wolfe's finest high-jinks in it, and is treasurable. The reader has hardly any chance to solve the mystery, however; he knows as soon as Goodwin knows — the moment Archie discovers a certain object. However, it is Wolfe's out-fencing of the FBI which carries the book to a satisfactory and suspenseful conclusion.

Nero Wolfe is a master of the art of equivocation, where the truth, or a part of it is stated in such a manner as to mislead the hearer; yet, the speaker cannot be accused of telling an outright lie. (Now and then, of course, Wolfe lies outrightly.) However there are some persons to whom he will not lie. Thus, when asked directly, he tells Stahl of the FBI, "I was born in this country." (*Over My Dead Body*). His early life was spent abroad, and at another time he states that he was born within sight of the mountain (*The Black Mountain*), meaning the Black Mountain in Montenegro. Furthermore, he certainly gives the impression of being a naturalized immigrant who is very grateful for the liberties and opportunities that the United States has given him; and he is scrupulous about paying every penny that the government legitimately asks of him at income tax time, without complaint. He further states that he is not so fatuous as to lie to an agent of the federal government — about himself, at least.

Paradox? Not necessarily. What does the word "I" mean? One assumes that it always has the same meaning relating to the same person, but consider: When an actor is discussing his role, he often uses the word "I" in reference to the character

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### IN THE LAIR OF THE SPACE MONSTERS

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by Frank Belknap Long

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he is playing. Thus we see that the "I" in Wolfe's statement to FBI Agent Stahl refers to his actual identity, while the other "I" refers to the name, "Nero Wolfe". Is not it elementary that, whether or not he is the son of Irene Adler and Sherlock Holmes, his decision henceforth to call himself Nero Wolfe was taken at a time when he was in sight of the Black Mountain?

From the descriptions given of Wolfe's closest friend in the series, Marko Vukcic, it is an almost inevitable deduction that the two are related; but whether they are brothers, half-brothers, or cousins remains dark. Baring-Gould asks, "Did Irene Adler have twins?" An interesting question, but consider the implications. Carla Lovechen (*Over My Dead Body*) almost immediately upon meeting Wolfe declares, "You sound like a Tsernagore...Or a Montenegrin if you prefer it, as the Americans do. You don't look like one, since Tsernagores grow up and up, not out and all around like you. But when you talk I feel at home. That's exactly how a Tsernagore talks to a girl...."

It is not a matter of accent, not a pose; it is something so deep that a Balkan girl spots it immediately. Wolfe is a Montenegrin, whether his father's name was Holmes or Vukcic, or whoever; he was brought up as a Montenegrin among Montenegrins. But this does not rule out the Holmes-Adler parenthood; he might well have been adopted.

Baring-Gould notes briefly some of the outstanding resemblances between Wolfe and the Holmes brothers in chapter 19 of *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*: Wolfe is a gastronome (like Sherlock and perhaps Mycroft, too); has an apparent insensitivity to women (like Sherlock); is "absolutely corpulent" (like Mycroft), and has little energy (like Mycroft), etc. I'd quibble over that final resemblance quoted. It is apparently true much of the time; for most of the time, Nero Wolfe does not

need an awful lot of physical energy. However, he shares Sherlock's will power, and Archie tells us of at least two major occasions when enormous, not just considerable, energy was needed to accomplish the task on hand: at both times, Wolfe rose to the challenge and proved his ability to take it if he decided he really had to (*The Black Mountain, In The Best Families*). And in the second instance, Wolfe walks out of his house on West 35th Street, goes in to hiding where neither Archie nor anyone else can locate him, takes off weight and grows a beard so that Archie does not recognize him when they meet next. There is no indication in Watson's series of accounts that Mycroft Holmes was or would have been capable of a similar feat.

But the psychic resemblances to Mycroft are far more prominent. Mycroft, his brother admits without rancor or hesitation, is far more talented than Sherlock Holmes. If he had the interest and energy to do so (and Mycroft does take a bit of action in *The Final Problem*, though it is nothing compared to what Wolfe goes through in the two cases listed above) he would far outshine the resident of 221 B Baker Street. Nero Wolfe actually has very little interest in detective work; he is aware of his genius for induction and deduction, and (like his presumptive father) has impressive acting ability: Wolfe's performance near the end of *The Silent Speaker* is magnificent - as fine a job as Holmes did in *The Adventure of the Dying Detective*, even if Archie is not as thoroughly taken in as Watson was in the earlier story. However, the thing to spot here is not whether Wolfe has really flipped his lid, but what his purpose might be for putting on this elaborate and prolonged act. I wonder how many readers guessed; it's not only a fine little mystery in itself, but also very revealing of the Nero Wolfe which rarely appears on the surface.

(Turn to Page 120)

## EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

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# Drome Of The Living Dead

by John Scott Douglas

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS had three stories in *WEIRD TALES* in 1935, two of which were in line with Farnsworth Wright's attempts to compete with the mystery-terror magazines, where the bizarre events had perfectly natural explanations. The present tale is in line with what *WEIRD TALES* was really about, and is one of the few stories dealing with the Great War — perhaps the only one with the war in the air.

MAJOR HUGH MILLER, wiry little Commanding Officer of the 1st Air Squadron, glanced up as his big, blond orderly entered his office. Hope struggled with despair in Miller's haggard gray eyes. "Is that one of Cameron's flight?" he asked hoarsely.

Lieutenant Clinton Creel's thin lips twitched with a faint smile. "No, sir" he answered crisply. "Just a plane being ferried here from the rear."

What was the ghastly secret of the mysterious Whirlwind Flight,  
and what made them fire upon their companions?



Miller glanced at his wrist-watch for the eighth time in an hour. "Ten or fifteen minutes more petrol in their planes if they're still alive, Creel." The C.O. ran a shaking hand through his iron-gray hair. "It's driving me crazy! Ten men gone in two weeks — vanished completely. Where, Creel — where?"

Creel shrugged. "The breaks of war, sir!"

Miller sprang to his feet, his face twitching. "Breaks of war, nothing!" he cried. "It's —" His bony hand made a trembling,

helpless gesture as he groped for words; words which would express the fear that had been crawling in his brain like maggots for the past two weeks.

The little officer began to pace back and forth, speaking in a voice husky with emotion: "There's a spy in our midst, that's evident, Creel. Someone's tampered with our beacon light each time a patrol returned after dark. But — how? I've placed guards around the switch; still it goes off. No one can find anything wrong afterward.

"The flights which should land here continue westward, unable to find this drome. Where do they go? If they cracked up, we'd get reports. If they landed at other dromes, they'd return. But ten planes we know of have flown westward in the last two weeks — never to return.

"No wonder the men are going screwy from the strain. They try to hide their fear. But it's there, all the time, preying on their minds....And what of that Whirlwind Flight? It swoops down, killing our men right and left. It's not a flight composed of flesh-and-blood men — it's composed of devils, of machines, of robots. The Frogs claim it flies westward, too — not eastward toward the German lines. They claim there are repainted D.H.'s in that flight; that it is flown by the phantom pilots of Yanks who died."

The C.O. broke off short, beads of perspiration standing out on his gray forehead. "They're crazy, of course — quite crazy —"

Shuddering as though in the grip of malaria, the little major began pacing behind his desk. Once more he glanced with glassy eyes at his watch, shook it, looked again. Then he pulled the blind back an inch from the window. Nothing but darkness, broken momentarily by a star shell dripping its tentacles of light down the sky. No sign of flashing exhaust stacks; no sound of droning props through the crashing, shrieking noises filling the night.

A blue flame seemed to burn in the orderly's light blue eyes. "You're taking this too hard, sir."

"Too hard!" The C.O. wheeled, eyes twitching with anger. "What would you have me do, Creel?" Miller's voice wasn't quite steady. "Laugh and shrug when I don't know what kind of hell

I'm sending those kids out to when I order them to fly? Every time I send 'em out, I wonder if I'll ever see them again. By night they vanish to the westward; by day, that damned Whirlwind Flight attacks like hell on wings!

"I'm not like you, Creel. I'm with those fledglings every minute they're flying. You don't feel anything. You have no nerves, no heart — you're like those demons in that Whirlwind Flight, you're a machine!"

Creel's thin lips tightened. "I don't let my imagination—"

"Imagination!" Miller snorted. "You have none!" Suddenly the wiry little major's body stiffened. "Motors, Creel! Cameron's flight—" He turned, eyes unnaturally bright. "The beacons are ready?"

"We examined them before dusk, sir."

"Yes, yes; I remember. And that ferried plane came in—"

The C.O. brushed past Creel, hurrying down the narrow corridor of the barracks toward the door. There he froze. Not a flight; just a single motor! The others had died? Something tightened in the major's throat. If that single pilot, Russ Cameron, had discovered that hidden airdrome from which the Whirlwind Flight came, the loss of two men was worth while. Tomorrow the bombers could flatten it. So ran his thoughts.

He sensed rather than saw men at "archie" posts, ready to fire the anti-aircraft guns. Other men stood at the beacons ready to place fingers of light on the plane to identify its insignia.

The droning was deafening, now, clapping sharply against barracks and hangars. The C.O. could see the sputtering, bluish-white flashes of its exhaust stacks. "Lights!" he barked hoarsely.

From the darkness came grunts and curses.

Swearing like a madman, the C.O. ran toward one crew. "Lights, you fools!" he bellowed. "They must work! Not five minutes ago—"

"That was five minutes ago, sir," a mechanic interrupted.

A cold sensation gripped the little major's heart. Strength seemed to flow out of his body. Above was a plane, flying westward to what? Death; destruction? Here on the ground they were

powerless to direct its course, yet the C.O. felt certain it was one of his planes. Once more some mysterious hand had blotted out their beacons.

Suddenly Miller saw red. "For God's sake, get lights! Anything! Matches, searchlights! We have to let that fellow know where his drome is; he hasn't over seven minutes' fuel in his crate—"

Men were only too eager to assist their comrade. Pilots came running out of the hangars with searchlights. Others struck matches.

There was a long, drawn-out vooooooo of a speeding projectile — then a blinding blaze of light. Blackness was blasted away. For a number of seconds, the major could see nothing. When he could distinguish objects again, the sputtering exhaust stacks showed him that the plane was far to the westward, flying a straight course. The shell had exploded at the moment when the pilot might have seen their myriad small lights; that moment had passed.

The major walked back to his office with bowed shoulders and numb brain. He felt as if the 71st were in the skeins of some intangible mystery. Russ Cameron meant more to Miller than any other member of the squadron. In sending him out to solve the mystery which had been cracking morale, he had played his last ace — and it had been trumped. The little major felt dead inside, utterly beaten.

Lieutenant Russ Cameron had been blinded by that exploding shell. Flying five thousand feet above earth, he had peered downward while the blue light quivered in a macabre world. A weird, unrecognizable world it was. Before his eyes could adjust focus, earth and sky were again drenched in blackness.

His daredevil blue eyes shadowed as he glanced at his petrol gage. Almost empty! A few minutes more, and he'd be groping blindly in the darkness for a landing — groping as Nevin, Crabbe, Rockwell, Towne, Brawley and others of the 71st had groped before him.

A weird foreboding chilled Russ Cameron's heart. In a few minutes, perhaps, he would learn how they had completely vanished from the face of the earth. Ten companions had vanished — where?

Death was understandable. The two friends who had left the 71st with Russ had died as brave men die. They had met a bombing squadron. Russ had accounted for two Fokkers; his two friends for one Fokker each before they had died from machine-gun lead. But you understood that!

Disappearing like the ten men who had flown westward over the 71st's drome, however, leaving no wreckage, no charred remains, nothing — that was what gnawed at a man's reason, undermined his belief in his own sanity. Russ shifted his big rough-hewn body uneasily in his pit. And would he, too, vanish like that when his petrol gave out?

Suddenly a beam of light fingered the sky. Relief surged over Russ. He had not passed the 71st — he was not lost!

The light struck his plane, blindingly. Russ could see nothing below, but he kicked left rudder, pushed his stick forward, and went into a spin. Another light shattered the blackness.

Russ's confidence returned. Right where the beacons were located at the 71st! His drome, all right.

The lights followed him down. Doubt suddenly crept into Russ's mind. What if this wasn't his drome? What if the lights had refused to work again? The C.O. had promised that Creel would place them under guard, of course ... but there were those vanished men!

Russ snapped his stick backward, sharply. Mingled suspicion and fear made his backbone creep. He glanced at his gage. A couple of more minutes, if he wanted to chance a blind landing. No — too hazardous! Death was almost certain, that way.

His hard, rugged jaw stiffening, Russ nosed down again, every sense alert, quivering. One of the lights dropped, outlining the field. Russ breathed easier. The outline was reassuring. The same shape as the 71st. Khaki-clad men were visible here and there near a building which must be the hangar.

Okay! He was safe!

Russ rolled in on the tarmac. Three khaki figures approached his plane. Russ felt the hair rising on his head. A cold fear pinched his heart. He had the illusion that he had died and that he was meeting his dead friends. He stilled the rising feeling of panic, and laughed — a short nervous laugh.

"Nevin! Towne! Brawley! How in hell did you get here?"

Nevin and Towne did not appear to hear. Their bulging eyes were blank and glassy. But in his friend Brawley the transformation was most pronounced. A big fellow, he had been — but his living skeleton, with skin like sagging parchment and blackened tongue showing behind colorless lips — what had been done to him?

Sweat sprang out on Russ's forehead. "Brawley," he screamed, "for heaven's sake, don't stand there staring like that. Speak, Brawley!" Russ Cameron's voice withered as panic swept over him. "Dead," he muttered thickly. "Dead, but alive! How—"

It came to him then with a horrible shock. Zombies! Part of his service had been in Haiti. He had seen things which he and the other men never discussed, accidentally witnessed voodoo rites which negated reason. Once he had seen a negro whom the curse of some witch-doctor had prevented from sleeping in his grave. Dead, the man had seemed, and yet he walked. A zombie! And the eyes of these men were like those of the negro — glittering, staring straight ahead!

Ice formed in Russ's veins as he snapped off his ignition and the prop of his plane stopped turning. His knees shook as he climbed down and walked between these living dead men toward the hangar. In a moment, he saw his mistake. It was not a hangar, it was an old French chateau. Familiar, too. Something groped in his mind, and after several seconds he got the connection.

It was a chateau he had seen from the air, in the Bois du Noir, said to belong to some French duke or other. Then he was far west of his destination, the drome of the 71st!

And then Russ saw why this drome within the Allied lines had not been found. Already other zombies were rolling down a heavy,

light-green matting over the drome. A lawn, seen from the air! But the beacons? And then Russ understood that, too. They were portable beacons, not fixed beacons such as were found at the 71st. When they were wheeled out of sight, the chateau would have just the proper air of unkempt desolation. Buried here in the woods, a mile from the main road, it had nothing to attract either interest or suspicion. Even in the day, when sentries in the towers reported that there were no other planes near by, the green matting which appeared to be grass from the air could be rolled back, and planes could take off. Three minutes later, there would be no sign that this chateau was anything of importance; that it housed these loathsome creatures.

Besides Russ walked his three former friends — stiffly, like huge, mechanical dolls. Goose-flesh traveled down his spine. He turned to flee. Bony hands gripped his arms, and he felt as if he were in the grip of a vise. And he was half dragged toward that chateau of horror.

A week before, a conked engine had saved his life by compelling him to desert a dog-fight when the Whirlwind Flight attacked. He was the only man who had seen the members of that flight of demons and lived to tell of it. Their faces, he now recalled, were like Nevin's, Towne's and Brawley's. Dead faces, devoid of expression. But those flyers had worn German uniforms.

Russ Cameron's brain seethed as he ascended the stone steps of the chateau. Other stiffly moving men were wheeling another Spad into the hangar. Had another flyer just preceded him into the trap?

They passed through an open door, turning right into a big room. Behind a desk at the other side of the room sat a small man with the face of a pig and upstanding yellow hair like porcine bristles. His uniform was gray, not khaki. Russ knew he was trapped.

His hand flashed for his automatic. Too late! Two huge Germans leapt at him from either side, pinioning his arms. Russ screamed: "Brawley, for God's sake, help me!"



The three Americans stood like stone statues, their faces blank, while Russ struggled with the two burly Germans.

In a moment he was relieved of his automatic, and his arms trussed at his sides. Meanwhile, another man in gray approached, and led the three zombies away. Poor, doomed souls — they had led their friend in life into this trap. Would he, Russ, do likewise?

His two captors marched him forward. The officer looked up at him with small, bright eyes. "Welcome, Lieutenant."

Russ swallowed a lump in his throat. "What have you done to Nevin and Towne and Brawley?" he demanded fiercely.

"I," said the little man, "am Baron von Kauptmann. Those are my men, members of what you American swine call the Whirlwind Flight."

The color drained from Russ's rugged face. "Brawley fight for you?" he demanded turbulently. "I don't believe it!"

The pompous officer laughed sardonically. "Your friends have died, Herr Leutnant. But in dying, they have left part of themselves to serve the Fatherland. Their brain cells! In Haiti, I learned this secret, ja? But from voodoo I learned only part of this secret. 'Suspended death' is what I call my serum; my slaves die, but their brains live, Herr Leutnant." He waved a pudgy hand at the Germans holding Russ. "I weary of baiting this stupid fool. To his cell!"

Rage burned in Russ's heart. The man's overwhelming conceit caused a red haze to swim before his stinging eyes. He broke from his captors, and started toward von Kauptmann with closed clenched fists. But heavy hands gripped his throat, and the two Germans dragged him backward, and half carried him out of the room.

Down two flights of steps he was taken, below the surface of the earth. The air was damp and sour, with a charnel scent of death which made Russ Cameron's flesh crawl. Only two electric lights illuminated perhaps twenty cages, only ten of which were filled. In the first one was a man whose old-young eyes lighted when he saw Russ. He must be the aviator who had landed just before he had.

"What is that fiend going to do with us?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Kill us", Russ formed with white lips.

The aviator's face drained of color and his face began twitching.

The reek of this morgue was so strong that Russ felt sick. On either side, as he was marched along, Russ recognized the living corpses of former friends. Their bulging eyes glittered as they sat motionless on stools staring straight ahead. None showed the slightest sign of recognition. Their parchment-like skin seemed to be drawn tightly over their skulls; they were incredibly wasted. And yet in each Russ recognized something familiar of the man he had known, and the gathering horror which washed over him caused his blood to turn to ice.

Zombies — his friends! And he was about to become another. What hellish serum was this of von Kauptmann's which could make of these dead men a fighting machine as deadly as the Whirlwind Flight which had so shattered the organization of the 71st? Did it feed the brain cells with some galvanic force such as the plates of a battery give forth by the action of acid? Some electrical action, perhaps?

He shuddered as the horror of the idea reached his dazed mind. Then he whirled on one of his captors, his fist flying toward the man's jaw. Crack! The powerful German went down as though pole-axed. Lightning streaked before Russ Cameron's pain-filled eyes, and his knees crumpled.

He gained consciousness from the blow he had received, to find himself in one of the cages. Outside the bars, he saw the pudgy German scientist, von Kauptmann. In his hand was a hypodermic needle. Russ felt as if his tongue had swollen so large that it filled his mouth. The end, this! He stared around his square cage. The guards had removed his stool. The only object in the cage was a pan of water.

As his eyes cleared, he saw two of the living dead men standing motionless beside von Kauptmann. Towne and Brawley! His own former friends used as the tool of his destruction! The German officer unlocked the cell-cage. Russ threw himself against the door.

"Hold him," von Kauptmann shouted.

The two zombies made stiff, awkward movements, but their hands closed on Russ's arms, and his struggles were futile. The German rattled off another order and Russ was dragged back into his cage. While they held him, von Kauptmann rolled up the American's sleeve and prepared to inject the hypodermic needle. Russ struggled afresh, his eyes wide with horror.

Suddenly all hell seemed to break loose in the last cell. The aviator who had been brought there before Russ began screaming and ranting. The glimpse he had had of Russ's treatment had proved too much for his reason. He flung himself against the door of his cage. He clung to it like an ape, screaming.

Von Kauptmann stiffened scowling, with the hypodermic needle pointed above Russ's bare arm. Then he laid down the needle, jumping erect.

"Verdammt!" he roared, "Of what use to me will a madman be? Leave this swine! We will attend him later!"

The zombies left the cell, walking mechanically, and von Kauptmann hastily locked the door. Relief surged over Russ so quickly that his knees buckled. The cracking of the other newcomer's reason gave him a few moment's respite. But of what use would it be to him?

He noticed the hypodermic needle containing the fiendish serum. If he could drive that into von Kauptmann's arm! No hope of that! He would send the two living dead men in first, and no needle could hurt them!

Von Kauptman had unlocked the door of the last cell, and had ordered the mechanical men to seize the hapless aviator. He struggled with a madman's strength, but the two zombies held him, pinioned him to the floor.

"Better," von Kauptman snarled, "that he have his serum now. If he continues like this, I can never depend on him."

He drew from his sagging pocket a kit, and removed from it a hypodermic needle. He held it up, and pushed the plunger slightly. When he saw a drop, he shook it off, and raised the man's sleeve.

He plunged in the point of the needle. Then he ordered the zombies to leave the cell.

The aviator began to shake violently; then a death rattle commenced. His eyes began to glitter feverishly, and he made shaking, palsied movements. He was dying!

Russ tried to shake off the numbing feeling of horror that gripped him. He had seen his own fate! Von Kauptmann was still watching the dying man, a sardonic smile on his thick lips.

Russ seized the needle, and had an impulse to dash it to the floor. How futile! Von Kauptmann would merely substitute another needle. Then he saw the water — a chance! He swiftly squeezed the serum from the needle, and plunged the point into the pan of water. He sucked the needle full, and emptied it in a dark corner of the cage. Now, surely the needle would be free of that deadly poison! Once more he filled it with water, and then placed it on the floor of the cage where von Kauptmann had left it.

Presently von Kauptmann returned, unlocked his cell, and ordered the zombies to hold him. Russ struggled with them to allay suspicion, but in a moment the German had rolled up his sleeve, and injected the needle into his arm. He felt the pressure of the water in his blood, and then began to shake as he had seen the other man do.

Von Kauptmann chuckled. "Another servant for the Fatherland, ja?"

Then he tossed a stool into the cage, and went away, leaving Towne and Brawley once more in their cages.

Russ felt weak and sick. Whether it was because of the presence of a fractional drop of the poison in his system or because of the hideous stench of dead bodies, he did not know.

How was he any better off than these corpses in this ghastly chamber of horrors? He was caged, and sooner or later von Kauptmann would discover that he was not dead. His second injection would not be water!

But the pattern of von Kauptmann's fiendish scheme was slowly clarifying in his mind. The German must have some means of turning out the beacons when night landings were to be made at

the 71st. Pilots would pass their drome, only to be drawn to this chateau by von Kauptmann's beacons. The drome here had been deliberately laid out in similar design.

He could guess at the means by which the Germans had come into possession of the chateau. It was not hard to believe the duke who had owned it had been murdered! Von Kauptmann and the few Germans he had serving him must have been transported across the line by plane at night.

Once the American pilots had been taken prisoner, von Kauptmann had put them under his power with his fiendish serum. Thus he possessed the most deadly fighting machine in the world. Zombies could not fear death because they were already dead. They could be prey to none of the fears or misgivings of living men. The most fearful odds meant nothing to them.

Small wonder, then, that this Whirlwind Flight had stricken terror and superstition into the hearts of men of the 71st and other squadrons along the front. They understood, subconsciously, that they fought a machine composed of creatures who were, somehow, less than human.

Russ saw that his only chance was to imitate the zombies as far as possible. Prolonging his imprisonment, he might find a means of escape! With this in view, he began rubbing the dust from his cell on his face, giving it a cadaverous appearance, creating an impression of hollows beneath his cheek-bones which did not actually exist. Then, by sitting motionless on his stool in the shadows, he might escape detection for a few days. Daylight, however, would reveal the truth.

Early the next morning, von Kauptmann came down the corridor between the cells, chuckling to himself. Loathing for the man swept over Russ in seething waves as he sat motionless on his stool, his face in shadow, and his begrimed hands looking like claws due to the outlining of dust. If von Kauptmann had been mad, Russ might have forgiven him. But he was not mad, unless a desire to serve the Fatherland by any means, however foul, was

madness. To him, this was an experiment in science, no less useful in its way than poison gas and shrapnel.

Presently a big, blond man in American lieutenant's uniform descended the stairs. Lieutenant Clinton Creel! He clicked his heels sharply together before von Kauptmann, and saluted.

Von Kauptmann frowned. "Fool!" he roared in German. "Do you wish this Jagdstaffel to be found by Americans, that you come here in broad daylight?"

"I beg your pardon, Your Excellency," Creel said. "But Major Miller is like a man out of his head on account of losing Lieutenant Cameron. I sought to ease his anxiety by taking his car and a driver and searching for the lieutenant's plane to the north of the tarmac. I ordered the driver to stay with the car, and came by round-about route through the woods searching for his plane. And I found this drome, ja?" His smile was cruel.

"Speak, then," von Kauptmann grunted. "But be more careful in the future."

"Your Excellency, at nine the swine of the 71st are once more going to seek the Jagdstaffel of the Whirlwind Flight. Disappearance of Lieutenant Cameron has aroused indignation to fever pitch."

Von Kauptman rubbed his pudgy hands together. "Ah, you bring us good news, Dizinger. Today we shall wipe out that squadron to the last man, no?"

"For the glory of the Fatherland," said Creel, his eyes alight.

Russ Cameron's body shook with fury. What he wouldn't have given for a blow at Creel's bland face, to have his fingers in Creel's throat!

Creel shortly took his leave, and von Kauptmann remained only a few minutes longer. He returned presently, however, with a flat-chested man in German aviator's uniform. Russ recognized the thin tight lips and the cruel, deep-set eyes of the big, broken-nosed aviator. Taube, the German ace! Russ had met him once in battle, and both had withdrawn with conked engines. Now Taube led Americans against Americans. Irony, that!

Taube carried a tray of small bottles, covered with rubber stop-

pers through which von Kauptmann plunged his needle to suck up the serum. He went into one cell after another, injecting the serum.

Russ understood that it was somehow necessary to charge the brain cells of the living dead men with this serum as it was necessary to charge the cells of a battery. His body tensed. They would have to kill him before he would submit to an injection!

Von Kauptmann paused before his cell, key in hand. "Bah!" he snorted. "I should waste my precious serum on you! You had plenty not many hours ago!"

Von Kauptmann spoke to his zombie slaves: "You will follow the great Taube into battle and do honor to yourselves and the Fatherland! You will fight whatever he leads you against."

They departed, but guards appeared presently to release them from their cells. Russ's brain raced. Should he strike now? But the armed guards would shoot him down if he attempted it. These robots would not help him.

The chance did not come. Before Russ could form a plan, they had reached the planes, and the zombies were mechanically climbing into the cockpits.

Shaking with anger, Russ climbed into his Spad. Now it bore Boche insignia. His prop was swung by a guard, and he revved up his bus savagely. Others did likewise; and finally the chocks were kicked from under the wheels.

Taube eased forward on his stick, roaring down the field into the teeth of the wind. Two by two, the living dead men followed their enemy — followed like so many mechanical sheep a man they would gladly have killed when they were alive. Lastly, alone, Russ trundled down the field, the end man on the right wing of the flight.

Up, up, up they climbed, roaring through a sea of clouds, submerged in mist, only to emerge into a clear sky at fifteen thousand feet. Russ's mind was on escape. But Taube would not be long discovering his absence, for he looked back frequently. If he vanished, the whole Whirlwind Flight would be after him, and he would lead this hornets' nest to the 71st.

Eastward they went, still climbing, with a glimpse of shell-gutted earth visible only infrequently through the rifts in the sea of white.

At eighteen thousand feet, they reached the ceiling, and Taube leveled out. Buzzing eastward, Russ saw a flight of German Fokkers winging westward, far in the distance, and at the tip of the cloud bank. If Taube noticed his countrymen, he gave no signal.

Suddenly another group of planes emerged from the clouds. The red, white and blue cockade! Members of the 71st. Russ Cameron's rough-hewn body tensed, and his heart beat a little faster.

A Very-pistol flashed its signal. Attack! The Spads leveled out, roared forward, straight for the Fokker flight.

Vickers and Spandaus began interlacing the intervening distance with bright red-yellow ribbons as the opposing pilots opened fire. The clattering of machine-guns could be heard even above the roaring of the Hisso motors. Russ watched, his eyes bright and hard.

Taube half turned, a cruel smile playing on his lips. He gave a signal which seemed to register on the eyes of the living corpses, reaching their brain cells as electrical impulses travel to a machine. The nose of his plane dipped. Down he went, his motor wailing. And behind him followed the Americans, only one of whom was aware of the horrible thing they were about to do.

Russ, his eyes twitching with anger, knew Taube's plan. Taube struck the American flight from behind, while they were occupied with German Fokkers. The German's claw-like hand reached for the stick-trigger of his machine-gun.

At that instant, Russ saw red. He knew these men followed Taube blindly, that they might take as enemies anyone acting against him. Something of this machine, however, must break. Russ could wait no longer.

He side-slipped, feeding his Spade full gun. Then he roared forward, straight for the tail of the diving German. Russ had never shot a man in the back before; now, however, there was no other course.



Taube's plane was outlined against the hair-line of his ring-sight. Russ squeezed the trigger of his Vickers. Twin streams of steel-jacketed lead lashed out, striking the German's back. He crumpled over his stick, never knowing what had happened. His plane went into a plunge, nose to earth, tail to the sky.

Russ's wild attack had carried him into Taube's position in the flight. Instinctively he flinched. Bullets would soon be tearing his body to ribbons! Moments crawled, and finally Russ turned. He shuddered as he saw the eyes of the corpses upon him — glassy, expressionless eyes.

They told him nothing. But their failure to attack could mean but one thing. He was now their leader! Incapable of more than the automatic action their training in flying had given them, they could not do anything save obey some thinking leader. Russ was that leader! A wave of exultation flowed over him. His was the command of the most deadly fighting machine on the western front! The Germans would taste their own medicine!

Russ pulled back on his stick slightly, his eyes hardening. The men of the 71st had not yet seen the Whirlwind Flight.

Russ nosed down toward the Fokkers, passed them. Then, bringing his nose up sharply, he accomplished a reversal by means of an Immelmann turn. Like automatons, the corpses executed the maneuver with him. When they came about, they were roaring down on the tails of the black-cross planes.

The Yanks saw them, then. Consternation must have filled their souls. The momentary paralysis which gripped them alone saved Russ.

Guns bickering, he roared down on the tails of the Fokkers. One plane was dead-centered in his ring-sight. Russ kicked left — then right-rudder — raking the plane with a cross-fire. Smoke curled up from the Fokker in black tendrils which were instantly pierced with darting tongues of flame.

The other members of the Whirlwind Flight slashed into the battle with the same deadly fury. Fokkers were being raked fore and aft. Pilots crumpled over sticks or tried to climb out of the devastating streams of incendiary-sprinkled lead.

But as they started to climb, the bewildered Yank pilots acted. The noses of their planes lifted. They zoomed after the fleeing Fokkers, driving in burst after burst of screaming lead.

From odds against them, the odds now favored them. They must have felt there was a mistake which would be quickly rectified when the Whirlwind Flight realized what they were doing. But they took advantage of what they believed to be an error.

Thrust between two such deadly fires, the Fokkers were doomed. Below them were the Yanks, above, the Whirlwind machine. One plane after another broke into flames. Bullets wrecked and slashed and tore the German ships to ribbons.

Russ saw a second pilot fall dead under his withering fire. Then a third...

The red haze which had swum before his eyes began clearing. Only one German pilot left, and he streaked for home.

Russ gave his signal, and zoomed. The Yank leader started to pursue, then dropped back. It was impossible for him to attack a flight which had saved his life, even though that flight bore black crosses. He waved, and presently his flight vanished in the sea of clouds. "Now what?" Russ asked himself. "If I return to the 71st, this legion of corpses will follow, and destroy everything in their path. Not even the 71st could escape! But if I return to von Kaupmann, I'll chance being discovered. At the very least, I'll be thrown into a cell."

Even those alternatives seemed preferable to risking the lives of his comrades at the 71st. Reluctantly, Russ returned with the machine.

When he landed, von Kaupmann strode angrily toward them. Russ carefully fell in behind several of the taller men; daylight was too revealing.

Von Kaupmann snorted: "Taube gone! Verdammt! It is evil luck!" But suddenly his face brightened. "Perhaps I have a greater machine than I realized if it is capable of going into battle and returning without a leader! Ach! no longer will I need that dope-fiend, Taube!"

Chuckling to himself and rubbing his soft hands together with satisfaction, von Kauptmann had the guards return them to their cages. Russ Cameron saw no chance to escape.

But when he was once more the sole living man in that chamber of the dead, Russ began pacing his cell impatiently. Creel would soon find some means of reporting what had really happened. Von Kauptmann would return to the cages with a better light. It would not require long for him to discover the one living man — and Russ would not be living long!

A guard came to the corridor, and released Brawley. Then he unlocked Towne's cage. Russ's heart beat fast as the guard paused before his own cell. Von Kauptmann was using these zombies for some work or other. If Russ could but secure his release! One man against one man!

And then Russ's pulses began pounding as the guard began unlocking his cage. It was an effort to keep his facial muscles under control, to sit motionless while his chance was coming.

Outside, he heard the drone of an airplane motor, the whine as it dived. He knew as well as if he could see that Creel was making the pretense of looking for the Whirlwinds so that he could communicate with von Kauptmann. In a moment, his chance would be gone. The guard hesitated, listening. Russ's heart was in his throat.

And then the key turned!

"Come out", the guard grunted.

Russ rose stiffly, and walked stiff-legged until he was a foot from the guard. Then the big German's mouth opened as he detected a false note in Russ's disguise — he was breathing.

Before the guard could utter a sound, Russ sprang. His fingers closed on the German's fleshy throat, shutting off all sound. But he was a big fellow, and Russ was weak from lack of food. The German rolled him over, clawing for his gun. Desperate as the Luger came out of the German's holster, Russ rolled him over on that side. There was no time for the niceties of fighting.

With sinking heart, he heard Creel's excited voice somewhere

above and von Kauptmann's bellow of rage. A shot from this guard would be his end. But if he could gain a few moments, he had a chance.

That was why, as he came over on top of the German and saw the gun flashing toward him, he thrust the big head swiftly toward the stone flooring. The crunch of the German's skull made him shiver — but the gun did not explode.

Meanwhile Towne and Brawley had stood like statues, taking no part in the affair.

Russ seized the guard's keys, hastily unlocking one cell after another until he was surrounded by living corpses. Then he picked up the Luger, and turned to the men.

"Follow me," he commanded them. "Seize the guns of men who try to oppose you. Obey no one but me! Now — forward!"

Von Kauptman was bellowing orders. There was a clamor above, then the footsteps, as men descended the stairs.

Russ sprang toward the entrance of the dungeon, Luger in hand.

A guard came into view. His rifle spat flame, and a bullet pinged from one of the cages. Before he could fire again, Russ's Luger cracked.

The guard stumbled and fell. Russ paused only enough to toss the rifle to Brawley.

Three more guards were just behind the fallen German. They blazed away. Bullets whistled and whined above Russ's head.

He dropped another man. Brawley rushed forward, his rifle spitting lead. The two remaining guards died before they could fire second shots.

"Seize their weapons!" Russ shouted hoarsely at the zombies, as he leapt over the bodies.

Another German descending the stairs aimed point-blank. Lead ricocheted from the stone walls. Russ brought his gun crashing down on the man's head. He could hear the German's skull crack.

Up the stairs Russ ran, the Americans close on his heels. The Whirlwind Flight was still the most deadly fighting machine in the World. But it was Von Kauptmann's to command. The baron

might change that, given the chance, but Russ was determined he would meet the German first.

He could hear men running ahead, realizing they faced death on the stairs from a group of zombies who could not be killed. Their destruction could be brought only by the difficult head-shot which would destroy the brain cells directing them.

Russ came upon a straggler who had stumbled. Wild-eyed, the man sprang to his feet, his gun exploding. Powder seared Russ Cameron's cheek, and he squeezed the trigger of his gun. The German's body sagged. Russ picked up his weapon as he bounded up the stairs.

Above, von Kauptmann's roaring voice:

"Go down those stair, you swine! Fire at their heads! I'll kill the man who hesitates."

A shot echoed from the walls as if to emphasize his words. The guards could be heard clumping down again.

Russ met them at the second landing. Bullets swirling about him, he rushed toward them. Lead seared his shoulders, but he ran on. Clubbing with his automatic, he beat down a guard about to fire. The living-dead men, with the gray, waxen countenances of corpses, surged forward, firing with deadly accuracy. The guards melted under their fire.

Picking up an automatic which had fallen, Russ took the stairs two steps at a time. Halfway up the last flight, he met Creel and von Kauptmann.

The German spy raised his automatic, squeezing the trigger. But fear of the grisly legion of the dead racing toward him made his hand shake. Lead whined in Russ Cameron's ear as he bounded up the stairs.

Von Kauptmann was shouting at the zombies to stop. They could not hear him yet above the cracking of Creel's spitting gun. Russ's fingers itched for the traitor's throat — but it was von Kauptmann he must reach first, von Kauptmann he must silence before he lost control of the machine.

"Creel!" Russ screamed hoarsely. "Kill Creel, men!"

He raised his automatic, squeezed the trigger. A sharp click.

Empty! Creel turned his gun away from Russ, aiming at the oncoming horde, his eyes wide with horror. Von Kaupmann pointed his weapon at the American leader. Russ hurled his empty weapon, striking von Kaupmann's right arm. The Luger flew from the German's hand. He stooped for it...

Russ threw himself at the legs of the leaning man, and they went down together. Von Kaupmann struck at his face with a pudgy fist. The American's hand clutched at the German's throat. And then a rushing tide struck him, and he felt a damp, icy hand slide past his face. The hand of the dead!

Von Kaupman was free for a moment, groping for the gun. Russ got to his knees, and then was hurled violently against von Kaupmann. He heard a piercing scream — Creel's voice. He could not turn — with von Kaupmann's fingers groping for the guns.

Then, slowly, the madness passed, leaving him sick with loathing at what he had done. Russ reeled to his feet, gazing with a horrible fascination at the grisly creature who lay dead at his feet. Von Kaupmann! Shuddering, he turned his eyes away, only to encounter a sight which made his backbone crawl. Creel — he had forgotten!

But the zombies had remembered. Expressionless, with glistening eyes, they were tearing and rending a bloody, misshapen thing. Creel! Life remained in that gory bundle of rags? It must! For the thing at which the zombies were tearing and mauling like vultures over a kill was still screaming in a way that froze Russ's heart. He had heard the frightful screams of pilots being burned alive in flaming planes — but nothing like this!

Sick and nauseated, Russ picked up the gun von Kaupmann had tried to reach, and fired three shots at the quivering thing these incredible creatures mauled. Convulsive movements shook the tormented body, and then Russ hoarsely ordered the zombies to stand at attention. Then he made an inspection of the chateau and hangars. No one! Guards and mechanics must have served in double capacity.

Now what would he do with these zombies? Von Kaupmann

could have told him — but he was dead. Placing a gun at their heads and destroying their brains would have permitted them to return to their graves. But that he could not do — these men who had once been his friends. Another idea!

Returned to their graves, a deadly fighting machine would be lost! Why not turn the hellish machine once more against the people who had devised it? Why not let these zombies leave earth fighting?

"Fuel busses, men," Russ ordered them. "We're taking off directly."

The corpses obeyed. Mechanically, they fueled planes and placed them on the dead-line under Russ's direction. When all were ready, Russ took his position at the point of the V-flight, and taxied down the field.

Not until they had crossed the German lines did they meet a German patrol — three wings flying in formation. Terrific odds! But what did odds mean to dead men? Only to Russ could it matter.

The details of that fight were never quite clear in Russ's mind. It came back in nightmares, and he would awake with his body wringing wet, and his eyes wide with horror, staring at blackness. But before he awoke, he would experience again some of those moments which had branded his subconscious mind with sights and smells and sounds unforgettable.

Bickering guns, cracking planes, bellowing motors. Screams from dying Germans which rose above the shrieking of diving, darting planes.

A machine which followed his every move. Glittering eyes registered his movements on the serum drugged brains, and the robot flight responded. They smashed up one wing, scattered it. And then the Germans broke formation, each singly bearing down on members of the Whirlwind Flight. But what could humans do against that grisly legion?

Zombies' planes caught fire, and still the dead men followed Russ, staring fixedly through walls of flame, and fighting until the

planes disintegrated and dropped horribly-charred bodies through the clouds.

Brawley's ship burst into flames. Yet he still sat at the controls, his hand on his machine-gun trigger, frozen-faced as a statue. A Fokker staggered under his fire and went plunging to destruction.

Even flames could not break his machine! It was invincible while fabric and machinery would hold together — an invincible armada of the skies! But one by one the corpses were released from their bondage, their heads riddled with bullets, or their bodies blackened with flames.

Russ remembered in those nightmares that they fought what seemed endless years, while one after another dropped out of his squadron; fought until only he and two Germans remained, and, as if both were sickened by the carnage, turned away and limped home.

Only when he awoke, his body shaking, did he remember the end: how he had landed the plane bearing the German insignia on his home drome by diving through a hail of anti-aircraft fire; and how, with glazed eyes, he had told Major Miller of those things which he could scarcely bring himself to believe.

"Leave it to me," the C.O. had said gently. "I'll recommend you for a Distinguished Service Medal — and there's no chance in the world you won't get it, after destroying that Whirlwind Flight. But how you destroyed it and who composed that flight — well, I believe you because there's nothing else this side of hell which could account for that Flight. But we'll have to have another story for the brass hats!"

The horror had slowly left Russ Cameron's eyes. "That's best," he had agreed.





# conjured

by Larry Eugene Meredith

HE WAS CERTAIN HE HAD BROUGHT IT into the room with him. He had entered only a moment ago. He had placed it upon the round table in the very center of the room, leaving it right beneath the lamp. Then he had walked over to the far wall and snapped on the overhead light. Next was a stop at the bar, where he mixed a quick nightcap. With drink in hand, he had crossed to the long bookshelves that took up one wall of the study. He had taken a brown covered book from a row of matched sets and flipped through it, reading the list of contents and a page or two of the stories. When he had finally carried the book back to the great easy chair by the round table, he discovered the evening paper was missing.

He looked under the table and the chair, and checked to see if he had placed it absently on the other furniture or the shelves or the broad windowsill. He carefully retraced his every step through the room. The paper was gone.

But it meant nothing. After all, he reasoned, he went through the same ritual every night and it had long been a habit with him,

One by one the furnishings and servants in Harper L. Finley's estate vanished, as if they had never been...

something he did automatically, without any thought. Probably he had not even carried the paper into the study with him to night, but only imagined that he had because he always did. It was strange how the memory could twist time when things were routine. You did things the same way so often, that you don't remember whether you did them or not. He went to the door of the study and called out for his valet.

"Did the newspaper come this evening, Hafley?" He hoped he didn't sound too foolish.

Hafley appeared promptly, which was one of the things that made Hafley a very prized servant. There was a puzzled expression on the valet's long, lean face. It was not a great change, but one eyebrow was arched higher than usual and the mouth had a deeper frown.

"Why, yes sir, it did. In fact, sir, I distinctly recall seeing you carry it into the study with you only a moment ago, sir. Do you recall now, sir?"

"What? Do I... Oh, yes, yes, so I did. Silly of me, I suppose. Must be getting old to ever forget such a thing. That will be all, Hafley."

"Very..."

*Well*, thought Finley, completing the phrase, but he had already turned and re-entered the study before Hafley got the last word out of his mouth. On an afterthought, Harper turned back to say something further to Hafley, but the valet had already left.

This angered Harper Finley slightly, and he had never felt any anger toward Hafley before in all the years the man had been in his employ. It was a feeling that seemed wrong to have, but still it was there. It was not unreasonable for Hafley to be gone. After all, Harper had dismissed him. Yet it angered him that the Valet had disappeared so quickly. Harper Finley called down the hall for Hafley, but he received no answer. This angered him further.

"Damnit, Hafley! Come here, man!"

But the servant did not heed his order.

"Damnit all! Where are you, Hafley? I'll have your job if you don't show yourself."

But Hafley did not show himself.

Harper Finley took a hesitant step into the dimly lighted hall. He started to call again, then thought better of it. Instead he went up the front stairs and with exaggerated casualness, peered into the various rooms. He came down the back stairs. He had just searched the entire house upstairs and not found a trace of Hafley. Even the man's clothing and personal belongings had vanished, almost as if Hafley had never existed at all.

"Quit, up and quit, and didn't even tell me. Not like Hafley at all. Must have planned it. All his things gone. Couldn't have happened on the spur of the moment. Whole thing planned," he muttered as he stomped down the steps.

He did not return to his study. It was too late to enjoy his paper, even if it hadn't disappeared. He was very upset. Every evening he had practiced the same routine. It had been this way for years. He would shower, put on clean clothing and take his newspaper into the study. Then he would mix an early nightcap, a last drink of the day, for he never drank after dinner, and while he sipped this final drink and waited for dinner to be served, he would peruse the paper and read a book. Tonight the paper was missing, his manservant was missing and his drink had been forgotten. He did not feel hungry, but he went to the table anyway and sat down at the head.

The table was not set. This was the final straw. After everything else that had gone wrong, he found the table unmade. It was too much. Harper Finley was furious. His mind began to sift through the evening's events to find a logical explanation. And he found one. It was simply a plan, a plot, by his servants to bleed more money from him. They had called a household strike to harass him into raising the staff's pay. Well, he would nip any such idea right in the bud.

With a roar, Harper Finley jumped up from the table and stormed into the kitchen. His face was already red when he began shouting for the cook, demanding to know why the table was un-set and dinner was not cooking. Then he realized the kitchen was empty.

The cook was not there. But neither were the stove nor the re-

frigerator nor the cupboard nor any of the utilities that had been in the kitchen.

Harper Finley was quite upset and a bit frightened. He dashed back through the house to the telephone located in the front hall. He sighed in relief to find that it was still on its stand where it belonged. He had the receiver to his ear and was about to dial before he even gave any thought about whom he should call. He set the receiver back in its cradle and turned away to think.

"Ah, I know. Braggman, I'll call Braggman. He'll know what's going on. He'll have an explanation."

But when he turned to the telephone, it was no longer there. Or was the stand or the thick telephone book that had sat next to the telephone. They were all gone. It was impossible, of course. Harper Finley turned ashen, swallowed hard, took his glasses off and cleaned them with his handkerchief. But nothing he did did any good. The telephone did not reappear. He felt for it. He touched the floor where it had been and the wall it had been in front of for many years, but he did not touch the telephone. Nervously, he backed down the hall toward the front door. He would go out into the fresh air and that might clear his head. If it didn't, he would go to a doctor, providing the whole world hadn't disappeared.

Without turning to look, he felt for the doorknob.

"It's gone, too, you know?" said a deep voice from his study.

Slowly Harper Finley walked into his study. The lights were on just as they were when he last left the room. And everything was there and in its proper place. But sitting in his great easy chair was a bearded man wearing a high pointed hat decorated with quarter moons and shooting stars, a hat like those ancient magicians were always pictured wearing.

"Who are you?" asked Harper Finley.

"A reasonable question, Mr. Finley. This is your house and I am an uninvited guest here. Yes, you may ask that question."

"Then who are you?"

"Oh, don't you remember? I call myself Amazar. It may seem a foolish name to you, but it does add to the aura, doesn't it?"

There was a newspaper lying on the round table next to the

magician. Harper Finley saw it was his evening paper. The magician followed his eyes. Amazar tore the front page off the paper, ripped in into small bits and rolled the pieces into a ball in his palm. Suddenly the magician pulled his hands apart and in place of the torn paper was one large sheet. He handed this to Harper Finley.

Harper Finley read.

"Betterment Committee closes carnival. Group charges fake fortunetellers and conjurers are pickpockets and thieves. Harper Finley, President of the Betterment Committee leads attack."

"I remember this," said Harper Finley.

"Yes, so do I. Tell me, Mr. Finley, don't you believe now?"

Harper Finley slowly shook his head. His mouth was open and he stared at the magician in obvious horror, but he refused to agree to such a thing. It was fakery and fraud.

A long white and gray Cadillac roared over the highway that crossed the rolling hills of the countryside. A gray-haired man with a hearing-aid protruding from his left ear was driving. His plump wife sat next to him calmly studying the passing scenery.

"That's odd," she said. "Do you see that hill over there between the willow trees. It is very strange."

"What's that, dear?"

"I thought Harper Finley lived there, but it's just an empty lot. I must have been mistaken."

"Harper Finley, you say? Do I know him?"

"Certainly. He used to be the President of the Betterment Committee."

"Ah, yes. Good man. Good man."

"Yes. I wonder what he's doing now. You never see him around any more. I wonder why."



# Inquisitions

**THE SECRETS OF DR. TAVERNER**, by Dion Fortune (With An Introductory Essay on *The Work of a Modern Occult Fraternity*, by Gareth Knight) Llewellyn Publications, 1962; 234 pp; available through Health Knowledge, Inc., 140 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y., 10011; \$4.95.

Some persons will turn themselves off immediately upon hearing that this series of tales is "based on actual supernatural happenings known to the author," and as for the introductory essay — well! However, such persons will be depriving themselves of fascinating reading, for these are first-class mystery stories, well written, and as fine entertainment as any series of psychic mystery stories in our field written by a skilled author who does not accept the basic premiss.

Dr. Taverner is not the "infallible" sort of occult detective, nor again is the narrator a superb-stupid non-entity, thrown in for humor and for the purpose of making the star look intelligent by comparison. These stories are closer to the excellent Miles Pennoyer stories by Margery Lawrence than to those of any other psychic series, more authentic in feeling than the Carnacki or John Silence series, because the author is thoroughly grounded in what occultism actually teaches, rather than deriving ideas from the fringes. I do not mean by this to demean either Carnacki or John Silence, having both respect and fondness for both, but there is a difference and it shows.

The stories are *Blood-Lust*, *The Return of the Ritual*, *The Man Who Sought*, *The*

*Soul That Would Not Be Born*, *The Scented Poppies*, *The Death Hound*, *A Daughter of Pan*, *The Subletting of the Mansion*, *Recalled*, *The Sea Lure*, and *The Power House*.

*The Scented Poppies* and *The Death Hound* are particularly chilling; *The Soul That Would Not Be Born* and *A Daughter of Pan* particularly moving, and *Blood-Lust* and *The Power House*, particularly relevant at a time when innumerable persons are being led to at the very least psychologically dangerous experimentation through the rash of irresponsible self-instruction books on black magic we are seeing at present. If all these things relating to witchcraft were nothing but fraud and fantasy, then such courses would still be irresponsible, but far less dangerous than they are; the unpleasantest part of it is that some of these things *do* work — and in the hands of self-centered, self-indulgent and irresponsible persons can do a great deal of damage to others besides the foolish practitioner, who will find in time that he or she is paying a very heavy price for what in the end proves to be worthless gains.

However, it is as fiction, well-written fiction which simultaneously entertains through a thrilling story and offers insight into the human condition, that I recommend this book. If you want to pick up anything on occultism here, you may do so without finding you have to unlearn it at a later time; and that is the essence of subsidiary value in any form of fiction. The author of a first class historical novel or story is not primarily concerned with teaching history; he needs authentic

backgrounds relating to events, conditions, etc., and reading his story will not give you distorted or false impressions of what actually went on in those times, insofar as it is possible to recapture them through historical studies.

Recommended to all tough-minded readers of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*.

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**THE SAX ROHMER REVIEW** (A non-profit amateur literary magazine dedicated to the works of Sax Rohmer. Edited and published for the Sax Rohmer Society by Douglas A. Rossman. Membership in the Society, including a subscription to the Review costs \$2.00 biennially beginning with 1970-1971, payable to Robert E. Briney, 233 Lafayette St., Apt. #2, Salem, Mass. 01970. Overseas rates: \$2.00 by surface, \$3.00 by air; payable to Billy H. Pettit, Control Data Ltd., 22A St. James's Square, London, S.W.1, England.)

Particularly in view of the fact that I expect to write about Fu Manchu for our next issue, Numbers 3 and 4 of this journal reached me at a most opportune time; and gave me the ideal opportunity to modify my comments on #2, which appeared in our #13th issue, Spring 1969. My copy of #2 was not too clearly printed, but may have been an exception to the general run; my copies of #3 and #4 are very clean indeed. And further, at that time, a year ago, I had not started my reading and re-reading project on Fu Manchu; having read all thirteen novels since then, I find this journal far more interesting now.

So if you are a Sax Rohmer fan, membership in the Society may be rather rewarding, and certainly you will find the journal of interest. Number 3 features, *The Green Spider*, by A. Sarsfield Ward, the long out-of-print short story which was the debut of the gentleman who later took up the pseudonym, "Sax Rohmer". It's a good puzzle mystery tale, very weird in

setting, yet with clues which will enable the alert reader (someone cleverer than I am) to arrive at the solution before the investigator does. Meaning that if you did not, a re-reading will show you, as it did me, that the needed hints were there before you. Also enjoyable in this issue is *Petrie Letter*, by Bruce Pelz; it's a brief letter, purportedly by Dr. Petrie to Nayland Smith describing the condition of the medical practice Petrie has just purchased, and the rather strange behavior of the man who had it before him. I could wish only that the first word in the 7th line up from the end had been omitted; it really doesn't need to be spelled out. Nonetheless, delightful.

The fourth issue has an interesting critique of Rohmer (under that title) written back in 1921 by J.C. Squire, and cryptological-minded readers will find Jeffrey N. Weiss's examination of the "Zagazig" code in *The Hand of Fu Manchu* fascinating. (I found it interesting, but was too lazy to work hard enough to decide for myself whether or not the author's conclusions are sound.) John Harwood relates an interesting anecdote in Rohmer's career, where he had written himself into a corner, had to produce more wordage in practically no time at all, and was at his wits' end. *Houdini to the Rescue* has to do with the still out-of-print *Fire-Tongue*.

One thing that the Society may be able to accomplish is to persuade Pyramid Books, who seem to be Rohmer's publishers here, to re-issue some of the lesser-known works, such as *Fire-Tongue*. And certainly *The Day the World Ended*, *Tales of Secret Egypt*, and *Yuan Hee See Laughs* should be revived. The Fu Manchu series have had a new printing, so it is clear that there is a ready market for Rohmer in soft covers.

Incidentally, there seems to be some disagreement among Rohmerians as to whether *Emperor Fu Manchu* or *Re-Enter Fu Manchu* was the final novel in the se-

ries. A correspondent notes the former as the last book — in issue #3 — and is not corrected by the editor; but other Rohmer specialists say that the latter was the final novel that Rohmer wrote about his most famous character. Perhaps some knowledgeable reader of SMS can nail this down with ascertainable facts and figures?

Along with the two issues I received was pages from Robert E. Briney's *Bibliographica Rohmeriana*, with #3, and addenda to same with #4. All in all, if you're interested, I'd suggest sending in your membership without delay. The first issue, I have heard, is no longer available, and the next three may start going out of print sooner than you think.

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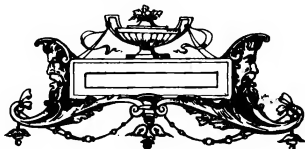
**SHERLOCK HOLMES: Two Sonnet Sequences**, by Jacob C. Solovay (with an introduction by August Derleth); Luther Norris, 3844 Watseka Avenue, Culver City, California 90230; \$3.00.

This is the latest pamphlet in the series issuing from Mr. Norris of the Praed Street Irregulars, and is uniform in excellence and make-up, with very pleasing artwork by Frank Utpatel, who has done many of the jackets for Arkham House and Mycroft & Moran books. None of these volumes are thick but since they are for a specialist audience, which means a

small print order and even then most probably a long time to sell out, the price is not exorbitant for the quality of the production.

Shakespeare or Mrs. Browning Mr. Jacobs is not, but who says he has to be? If you love the Sherlock Holmes stories, and enjoy such Sherlockian activities as reading writings about the writings, then you will find these 38 sonnets enjoyable, as I did myself. The sequence is in two parts (1) A Baker Street Dozen (2) Conversations in Baker Street.

So if you're already hooked on Sherlockiana, you'll want this one. If not, I'd suggest some of the other titles first, although once you're in you may find that you'll want this, too. The reader should be warned: This can become an addiction, and the withdrawal symptoms, should you decide to stop, while not lethal, can be very painful. Even worse are the sorrowful cases of persons who kicked the habit and disposed of their collection, only to relapse and then find they had to re-collect all over again. My advice (from excruciating experience of addiction to other forms of collecting) is, *don't dispose of them*: put the collected items away somewhere out of sight, telling yourself firmly that you'll get rid of them "some day". Then when the fiend ensnares you again, why there they are, and how grateful you'll be to your indulgence!





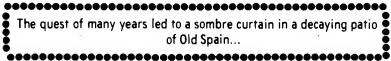
# The Golden Patio

by Aubrey Feist

I FIRST REMEMBER "THE GOLDEN PATIO" as the one ray of light in a dark old house; a door that opened on Fairyland from a world of wax flowers and horsehair sofas.

The picture belonged to my grandmother and hung in an angle of the stairs. It fascinated me as a child and often, when no one was about, I climbed on to one of the high-backed chairs and gazed into its yellow heart.

The painting was wrought in oils, and was old and discolored. It depicted an archway of crumbling stone closed by great gates of twisted iron which I always firmly believed to be locked, as though they were shut upon something intimate; something too



The quest of many years led to a sombre curtain in a decaying patio  
of Old Spain...

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beautiful or too terrible to be pried and peered at by mortal eyes. Through the bars could be seen a Spanish courtyard, full of tall, shadowy pillars and palm-trees, and fountains that sparkled beneath the moon. In the darkest corner, there was a door, heavily curtained with sombre velvet, while through a rift in the curtains came light—a misty stream of yellow radiance which flooded one side of the great dim courtyard and gave it its name, "The Golden Patio."

I used to wonder what lay in the room, what secrets were hidden behind those curtains. The patio seemed like a prologue in stone; the gateway to a deeper mystery.

A strange old picture, yet, such as it was, the only sign of artistic taste that my grandfather had ever shown. He, Peter Romsey, had been a sea captain; the best of sailors, the worst of men. Even at home they heard of his escapades: low, sordid tales of drunken orgies, of floggings, mutinies and brawls, and of queer cargoes shipped at dead of night, which no honest skipper would have aboard.

And then, quite suddenly, he died. His few effects came home to England: a battered sea-chest, a caul, a sharp gully, some old Spanish lace and "The Patio." My grandmother knew nothing of the facts of his death save some talk about drink and a foreign woman; but, as she had grown to hate his memory, she stowed the chest in the lumber room, where it lay, fast locked, for the rest of her life. The lace, she sold for a third of its value, while, as for "The Golden Patio," it hung in disgrace on the dark old stairs to fill my childish heart with wonder.

It is hard, even now, to realize what a hold that picture had on me. I was a lonely little boy and, like all such children, inclined to dreaming. I wove wild stories and legends about it till, by degrees, it seemed to tell of something strong and elemental, something I could not understand. Romance was in "The Patio," in the close-locked gates and the hidden room; not romance as we northerners know it, but something born in a land of red hills and great slow-surfing rivers, of scorching sun and cruel, hot color. It breathed the spirit of Spain.

Often in later years, while gazing at Goya's masterpieces, I have caught in his fierce, glowing fires and savage faces, a glimpse of that same hard, primitive atmosphere. The picture lured and yet repelled me. It spoke to me of another world.

Even as the years wore on and I began to dream love stories, full of the lazy lilt of guitars and the perfume of exotic flowers, it

was always of wild, unhallowed love, while sometimes, on dark winter nights, the picture was radiant no longer. It looked dull and brown and dead and wicked. It seemed to tell of lust and anger, of savage oaths and the rattle of knives. I feared "The Patio."

By degrees, as the spell grew stronger, I developed a love for everything Spanish. I studied the language of old Castile, I devoured its noble literature; while the fact that the picture at last became mine did not lessen its attraction. It hung in my study for many a year and when, at length, I came to travel, "The Golden Patio" traveled too.

Obedying perhaps some strange instinct, I followed my grand-sire's footsteps south. I wandered through Italy and France. For months, I loitered along the Loire; then, when the fever possessed me again, I hastened down through Languedoc to the Pyrenees and Spain.

I shall never forget the day when I first crossed the frontier and steamed slowly southwards from Port Bou. I felt that I was in sight of my goal, that it lay in the haze of those bare brown hills, where the little rugged villages seemed carved from the living rock. Yet, as I slept and sweltered among priests and flies and peasants, I ceased to exult and my heart grew cold for I knew that my search was far from ended. My search! Yes, my whole life had become a quest, a quest for something vague and intangible . . . pillars, palm-trees and yellow light.

Often I cursed myself for a fool and sometimes in the early morning, when the spell of "The Patio" was weak, I thought that I would destroy this lodestone which had drawn me to Spain against my will. Then, at night-time, when the moon came out, and the picture lived and spoke to me, I thanked heaven that I had held my hand, for I knew that without it, I might falter or even, perchance, abandon my mission. I had a mission; of that I was certain. There was a riddle, a mystery to solve; and the key to the mystery was still to be found—in the gates of the Golden Patio.

For five years, I probed the heart of Spain. For five years, I wandered from town to town, living with gypsies and honest farm-

ers, with smugglers and consumeros. I spent lonely nights on the high sierras when the cup of the world was gray with moonshine, and the little twinkling lights in the valley shone like the watch-fires of an army. I drank strong Alcala wine with peasants and watched their ancient rhythmic dances which must have been old in the days of the Moors.

I walked in the avenues of Seville and feasted my eyes on the matchless Giralda. I lounged on the Puerta del Sol at Toledo and saw bulls butchered at Madrid. I roamed Spain from Burgos to the Rock till, at last, by way of the sea, I came to Palma, lying like a great jewel on the plain, washed by the long bright waves and flanked by the misty mountains of Majorca.

There, in some measure, I found content among people whom time has barely touched; courtly, grave and kindly folk such as they tell of in old tales. I made my home at a vine-covered fonda which stands on the hillside near Porto Pi, and thence it was my custom to drive daily into Palma in the little rattling, dusty trams that wind down the white road among the olives.

Palma itself is a delight; a golden city, full of sunshine, and set in the midst of a flowering plain. It is dry and white with blinding dust, a place of tall palmtrees and prickly pear. There are queer crooked streets, dim echoing churches, and crumbling ramparts of sun-baked stone where fishermen hang their nets to dry and soldiers take their noonday siesta.

I grew to love this city of memories where the past rubs shoulders with the present till, all at once, my peace was shattered. I heard the old insistent call.

I was a Romsey, and, deep in my heart, was my grandfather's passion for ships and the sea. In all the Balearic Islands, there was nothing I loved like Palma Bay with its crowded harbor, its white feluccas and its swarm of swarthy Spanish seamen. I chanced to be walking there one evening, dreaming and watching the tall-masted ships. I could hear the south wind among the palms, the throb of bells on the still, warm air and the distant hum of the ancient city, sleeping within its broken walls. The sun was down behind Bellver woods, tipping the castle tower with crimson and pouring

its pale light upon the sea. Each burnished wave was tipped with fire. Everything was gold, bright gold!

Standing in the flood of light with everything radiant about me, I obeyed the call again without question and plunged anew into the town. Nobody hurries in Majorca, so I lounged for an hour or two by the Lirico, watching the crowd which thronged the Borne: priests, soldiers, fishermen, girls and bronze-hued peasants.

Then at last, when the sun had sunk to rest and the trees were turning gray in the gardens, I rose and wandered into the dark maze of alleys that lie in the shadow of the Cathedral. I do not know how long I walked there. The moon came out and the quiet streets emptied. On I went without thought or reason, searching as I had searched for years. I was hardly conscious of my whereabouts when suddenly, looming out of the shadows, I saw the great arch of the Almudaina. I walked through the crooked gateway and blindly on. I turned to the left; to the left again. I emerged from the black mouth of an alley and there before me were gates of iron—the gates of the Golden Patio!

For a moment, I stared, swept by a storm of conflicting emotions—joy, fear, wonder and a feeling of emptiness and pain. It seemed as though a curtain had been rung down on my life. For years, my life had been a search and now the quest was ended.

Treading softly, I approached and peered between the rusty bars. Within all was rotten and decayed. The fountains were silent; the palms were dead; rough weeds crept through cracks in the broken pavement. I felt disappointed, almost angry. Could it be that I was mistaken?

And then some unseen hand drew the curtain and from the doorway in the corner came pouring floods of dazzling light which threw into sharp relief each withered palm and painted a shining golden wedge on the shadowy flagstones of the courtyard. I hid my eyes, and, in my joy, I breathed a silent prayer of thankfulness. Those long years of search had not been in vain for now there could be no doubt. This was the Patio.

Now across the street stood a high blank wall, and, leaning

against it, I saw an old man, a dirty rogue in grey alpacca who puffed a greasy black cigar and watched me through the swirling smoke. He raised his hat as I approached and his fat face creased into a smile. "The senor Ingles has lost his way?"

I laughed and waved towards the Patio. "On the contrary, I have found it," I cried.

He raised his eyebrows at my answer; he grinned at me slyly and sidled nearer. "What is the senor's pleasure tonight?"

"I want to know who lives in that house."

For a moment, the man eyed me very keenly; then he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "Don Ruy Gondomar lived there, senor."

"And does he live there now?" I asked.

"*Quien sabe, senor? Who knows?*"

And with a secret smile in his eyes, he raised his hat and walked softly away.

I glanced around. The street was empty. All the houses were in darkness, their shutters closed against the world. The sky was pale with a haze of stars and the moonlight painted the whole world silver. A silver frame for a monstrous painting of iron bars, black as ink against a glare of pulsing, living yellow.

The patio! I crept slowly nearer, drawn to it almost against my will. Through the gates came the sweet, hot scent of verbena and the reek of damp and rotting leaves. The air was heavy and still as death. I could hear the soft drone of the mosquitoes. And then, clear and cold as the note of a bell, came the music of a woman's voice: "Perdro! Pedro mio!"

I opened the great iron gates and entered.

Hardly was I inside the arch before I became conscious of another presence. I felt, I knew that I was not alone. There have been times when, in some crowded room, I have known instinctively that some near relation was standing at my elbow. It was just the same now. I could see no one, but this strange impulse made me peer behind each slender pillar which might conceal a friend or foe.

For a while, I stood motionless in the archway, then feeling my way through the damp vegetation, I crossed the great silent courtyard and came to the little door in the corner. The heavy curtains hid the room but I could hear low sobbing and, through the sobs, that passionate whisper: "Pedro! Pedro!"

Pedro! I thrilled at the sound of the name, for was I not Peter like all my line? Could it be that this woman was calling me, had called me across the breadth of Europe?

I felt my pulses quickening and nerved myself for the encounter. Then, even as I stood irresolute, I heard the opening of a door, a frightened gasp and a man's soft laugh.

I waited no longer but crept back the way that I had come, stealing from moldering pillar to pillar, groping my way through the wet, clinging leaves. At last, after what seemed an age, I came to the gates. With beating heart, I darted into the archway and felt about for the carved handle. And then, the blood seemed to freeze in my veins, for I realized that I was a prisoner. The gates of the Patio were locked!

For a moment, I felt almost frightened, for I knew that I had placed a stone to prevent their clanging and betraying me. Someone had locked the gates deliberately, someone who knew that I had entered. Could it be the man in grey? I remembered his smile and his crafty eyes. Doubtless he was some friend of Don Ruy, who had watched my somewhat furtive entrance and contrived to trap me neatly. So he would return with the police and I would be dragged away to jail, charged with trespassing, house-breaking and Heaven knows what else besides, for the Spanish police are very thorough, and justice is swift and merciless in Palma de Majorca.

There was no time to lose, and, if I would escape, there was only one thing for me to do. I must make a clean breast of the whole affair; rouse the household and apologize. After all, my intentions were harmless and it is better to look like a fool than a felon.

I walked boldly across the courtyard, concealing myself no



longer, for concealment was unnecessary. So I came opposite the little doorway and caught a glimpse of the room beyond. It was cold and bare, like most houses in Palma, with great black beams and furniture, and curious three-beaked lamps of brass which threw a flickering yellow glare upon the walls of rough white plaster. There was no romance, no mystery till, all at once, came a rustle of silk and the woman stood leaning in the doorway.

I can see her now, I shall see her always: tall, slim, divinely graceful, her dark eyes wide with fear and loathing, and her fingers twisting and wrenching at her rosary of golden beads. I knew instinctively that she was afraid; afraid of a man who lounged, lolling and smoking, in one of the high-backed leather chairs; a swarthy man with great pouched eyes and lips as red as those of a dancing girl.

She stared straight in front of her, through and beyond me, and, all in a moment, I yearned for her. I loved her face, pallid as a moonstone, her crimson mouth, her haunted eyes, her black hair coiled 'neath the combless mantilla. It seemed as though some strange spirit was in me, something strong and fierce and primitive. All the calm years of my life were forgotten, their lessons lost in a surge of emotion. Hot and trembling, I sprang towards her, and bared my teeth like a savage dog when the man reached out a languid hand and drew her down upon his knee.

With one bound, I leaped the stream of light and crouched in the shadow of the doorway. The curtains hung in sable folds, and behind one of these I concealed myself. There was sweat on my brow and my teeth were chattering. I wanted to rend this man like a beast. I cannot explain my sensations now, and, at the time, I did not attempt to do so. I only know that my blood was on fire and that at my ear was that devil's whisper, urging, tempting me to violence.

Thé swarthy man was speaking softly. I could hear his voice like a voice in a dream. It seemed to come from far away. It was strange; weird. I cannot explain it.

"You are beautiful . . . beautiful, Inez," he whispered. "You are like the snows on the Puig Mayor, so white, so cold. . . ."

The lady's white fingers wrenched at her beads and I heard her laugh softly, mirthlessly. "My husband, Don Ruy, has learned to pay compliments?"

"Of course. It was to be expected. Jealousy is an excellent teacher!" Don Ruy smiled at his wife's tragic face and the butt of his cigar glowed red as he blew a thin cloud of oily smoke. "Is not your beauty renowned in Majorca? Am I not said to be blessed with a wife fit only to mate with angels or — Englishmen?"

The woman's mouth gaped hideously; she stifled a scream with one jeweled hand.

"Why—what do you mean? Ruy, you're mocking me."

"Nothing but idle compliments, Inez. *Caspito!* I'm learning fast. Pray sing."

"I—I cannot, Ruy. I am not well to-night."

At last, Don Ruy raised his voice, a voice that lashed her like a whip.

"Sing, Inez, sing. It is my wish. The Englishman must be entertained."

I heard the beads rattle upon the floor, one by one, slowly, like dripping blood. The woman was groveling on her knees, clawing at her husband's shoulders and striking that smiling, impassive face with little vicious, tight-clenched hands.

"Ruy! Ruy! You Fiend! You devil! I'm innocent. I swear by the Cross."

Don Ruy laughed shortly and spat at her; then, without haste or hesitation, he drew a long Carracas dagger. I saw the blade gleam as he slowly unclasped it, and felt my flesh tingling with fear.

"You fool," he laughed softly. "You pair of fools. Fools to doubt my vigilance. Fools to put faith in Pablo Mendez."

Inez gave a shriek at the sound of the name. She kept repeating it, wildly, insanely.

"Pablo? Pablo? My servant betrayed me? Pablo Mendez whom I trusted?"

"Of course he betrayed you, *carita mia*. Gold tempted him as love tempted you. *He* sold his honor for gold, Inez. 'Twas he who called me back from Pollensa to watch your meetings with the

Englishman. 'Twas he who betrayed your Pedro tonight. Ah, Pablo Mendez shall be rewarded. He is an honest, a trusty servant."

I tried to shut my ears to her cries, her oaths, her prayers, her piteous pleading. I strove to catch some glimmer of light, some answer to this monstrous riddle. This House of the Patio was accursed, and I, it would seem, was under its spell, drawn into the midst of a web that was closing and tightening slowly round me. I buried my face in the fold of the curtain, I pressed my hands upon my ears, but still I could hear her pitiful moaning and that ceaseless cry of: "Mercy! Mercy!"

"Mercy?" sneered Ruy. "What mercy had you—you and your foul Englishman? What did you care for my honor, my pride, for a name that's been stainless since Jaime's day? Oh, you were cunning, I'll give you your due. But I could be cunning, also, Inez. Tonight, by my orders, the gates of the Patio were left unlocked. I am a considerate husband."

A strangled cry escaped me, and Don Ruy raised his eyes. I saw that, like the blade of his knife, they shone dully yellow in the lamplight.

"Your lover is near," he went on quietly, smiling and glancing towards the curtains. "Pablo was watching across the street, and, when your Englishmen entered my gates, he locked them; locked them and trapped him, Inez. He is here. He is safe; but I will be kind. Your *cortejo* shall lie in your arms tonight."

I freed my limbs from the folds of the curtain. I crooked my hands and prepared to kill. Don Ruy was silent now and motionless, peering towards me with narrowed eyes. Some movement of the curtain must have attracted his attention for, flinging Inez on one side, he crept slowly forward, crouched almost double, his face wreathed in a ghastly grin and the long knife glimmering in his hand.

Something seemed to snap in my brain. I became a prey to blind bloodlust. I longed for a dagger to slay this man who stood between me and my woman. I bared my teeth; I crouched to spring. But Don Ruy strode to the other curtain. With a low, wicked oath, he tore it aside; then even as he raised his arm, there

came a livid streak of steel and a long knife was buried in his throat!

For a moment, there was utter silence. Don Ruy slithered to the floor, where he lay smiling horribly in death. Inez was swaying upon her knees, when the curtain was flung back without a sound, and a man leaped forward and caught her in his arms. He was so quick that I could not see his face, but, as he knelt with his back towards me, something in his build and carriage seemed strangely, horribly familiar. I knew at once that this was the man of whose silent presence I had been conscious in the Patio. His spirit was somehow attuned to mine. He influenced my thoughts and actions. It was not Pablo Mendez. It was no one I knew, and yet. .

The rest of the scene is indescribable. It was almost as though it had been rehearsed. There was no violence, no strong emotion; just a dull apathy, a deadness. The man and the woman both acted with a sort of dreary, senseless monotony, as though they were in some grotesque play. There was a sense of repetition. . . .

Between them, they straightened Don Ruy's limbs and set a pale Crucifix in his hands. Once and once only did Inez speak, pointing a white finger at his face.

"Oh, Pedro," she moaned. "Oh, Pedro. His eyes!"

Still with his back towards me, the strange man knelt and took two pesetas from his pocket. Roughly he closed the eyelids and weighed them down, while the woman crouched trembling by his side, with utter despair in her ashen face. I can see them now, those three grim figures: the man, the woman and poor Don Ruy with the great white coins on his eyes and his sallow throat all creeping crimson.

Pedro and Inez knelt for a moment; then hand in hand, guiltily like thieves, they crept out softly into the Patio. The woman's white fingers were pressed to her lips and she kept glancing back with wide, glassy eyes; but the man dragged her on remorselessly, and, although I could not see his face, I knew, in my heart, that he was laughing. There could be no doubt, he was utterly callous; and

perhaps it was this very savagery that broke the spell of silence which bound me.

"Murderers! Murderers!" I screamed when they were all but lost in the darkness. "Come back, you devils. You've murdered him."

Still they kept on without any haste, till they stood by the great gates of twisted iron which now stood open for their passing. I was at their heels. I was almost on them when, all at once, with a soft, evil laugh, the man stepped out from the shadow and stood within an arm's length of me, full in the glare of golden light. He seemed almost wraith-like in brilliance; a shadow without form or substance. I stared at him and screamed with horror, for he was as tall and as broad as I. He had red hair and eyes as dark as mine. Save for the loose mouth and heavy jaw, the man's face was my own!

When I came out of my swoon it was getting light. The dawn was creeping up from the sea and the Patio was cold and gray. I staggered slowly to my feet and reeled through those grotesque, evil gates. Across the street was the high blank wall and, leaning against it, I saw an old man . . . a dirty rogue in gray alpaca who puffed a greasy black cigar and watched me through the swirling smoke.

"*Buenas dies tengen*," he cried in the ancient dialect of the island. "It is cold at this early hour, is it not, for those who are poor and have no homes?"

"Traitor?" I cried. "Do you know what you've done? There was devil's work last night, Pablo Mendez."

The old fellow scratched his dirty chin and raised his black sombrero. "The caballero is mistaken. My name is not Mendez," he said softly. "I am Jose Diego Ramon Concepcion Esteban Alvarez."

"But the House?" I cried wildly. "The House of the Patio? Who lives there? Tell me! Tell me, man!"

"*Si, si, senor*. That old place yonder . . ." He shrugged and smiled. "There was a murder there, years ago. Don Ruy Condomer was killed. An Englishman stabbed him and stole his wife."

I felt the hair rising on my scalp. "An Englishman? Do you know his name?"

He thought for a moment with half-shut eyes; then all at once, he snapped his fingers.

"I believe . . . yes, it was a sailor called Romsey; an evil liver, from all accounts. 'Twas he or another. I cannot remember. . . . Bah! what does it matter? He is dead."

"But Romsey!" I gasped. "Peter Romsey! My grandfather!"

"Your grandfather? Is that so, indeed?" In an instant, Alvarez was all smiles. "Ah, he was a great one, El Capitan Ingles. A noble lover! Neat with the knife."

"And the house? Is it empty? Who lives there now?"

The old man crossed himself and shrugged his shoulders as he moved away. "*Quien sabe, senior?* Who knows?"



## The Reckoning

A slight goof on the contents page of our last issue hit me, of course!, just a little too late for correction; our *Reckoning* which you saw in the Fall 1970 issue was not that relating to issue #14, but issue #15, Spring 1970. And here is the summation of your findings on our Summer issue, #16.

Everyone who commented on the issue did not mention the cover, but with those who did, the consensus splits right down the middle, exactly. Half of you thought it was very good — really startling and mysterious (as I did myself); the other half thought it was very poor. At least the artist did not leave you indifferent?

Two stories were in contention for first place this time, although for the first half of the balloting, it looked like a walkaway; it was in the second half that there was a bit of jockeying for position, and then the winner broke clean and came in, though leading by less than a length.

Here's the finish data: (1) *The Devil's Rosary*, Seabury Quinn; (2) *The Man Who Collected Eyes*, Eddie C. Bertin; (3) *The Temple of Death*, David H. Keller, M.D.; (4) *The Silver Bullet*, Phyllis A. Whitney; (5) *The Smell*, Francis Flagg. Only the first two stories drew "outstanding" votes — but no one at all drew "dislike" designations; that is most unusual.

# The Cleaning Machine

by F. Paul Wilson

DR. EDWARD PARKER REACHED ACROSS his desk and flipped the power switch on his tape recorder to the "on" position. "I want you to listen to this, Burke," he said. "She has classic paranoid symptoms; I wouldn't put much faith in anything she says."

Detective Ronald Burke, an old acquaintance on the city police force, sat across from the doctor. "She's all we've got," he replied with ill-concealed exasperation. "Over a hundred people disappear from an apartment house and the only person who might be able to tell us anything is a nut!"

Parker glanced at the recorder and noticed the glowing warm-up light. He pressed the button that started the tape. "Listen:"

"... and I guess I'm the one who's responsible for it but it was really the people who lived there in my apartment building who drove me to it — they were jealous of me.

"The children were the worst. Every day as I'd walk to the store they'd spit at me behind my back and call me names. They even got other little brats from all over town and would wait for me on corners and doorsteps. They called me terrible names and said that I carried awful diseases. Their parents put them up to it, I know it. All the people in my apartment building laughed at me.

The only explanation for the disappearances was the one given by this old lady — an obvious kook ...

They thought they could hide it but I heard it. They hated me because they were jealous of my poetry. They knew I was famous and they couldn't stand it.

"Why just the other night I caught three of them rummaging through my desk. They thought I was asleep and so they sneaked in and tried to steal some of my latest works, figuring they could palm them off as their own. But I was awake. I could hear them laughing at me as they searched. I grabbed the butcher knife that I always keep under my pillow and ran out into the study. I must have made some noise when I got out of bed because they ran out into the hall and closed the door just before I got there. I heard one of them on the other side say, 'Boy, you sure can't fool that old lady!'

"They were fiends, all of them! But the very worst was that John Hendricks fellow next door who was trying to kill me with an ultra-frequency sonicator. He used to turn it on me and try to boil my brains while I was writing. But I was too smart for him! I kept an ice-pack on my head at all hours of the day. But even that didn't keep me from getting those awful headaches that plague me constantly. He was to blame.

"But the thing I want to tell you about is the machine in the cellar. I found it when I went down to the boiler room to see who was calling me filthy names through the ventilator system. I met the janitor on my way downstairs and told him about it. He just laughed and said that there hadn't been anyone down in the boiler room for two years, not since we started getting our heat piped in from the building next door. But I *knew* someone was down there — hadn't I heard those voices through the vent? I simply turned and went my way.

"Everything in the cellar was covered with at least half an inch of dust — everything, that is, except the machine. I didn't know it was a machine at that time because it hadn't done anything yet. It didn't have any lights or dials and it didn't make any noise. It just sat there being clean. I also noticed that the floor around it was immaculately clean for about five foot in all directions. Every-



where else was filth. It looked so strange, being clean. I ran and got George, the janitor.

"He was angry at having to go downstairs but I kept pestering him until he did. He was mighty surprised. "What *is* that thing?" he said, walking towards the machine. Then he was gone! One moment he had been there, and then he was gone. There was no blinding flash or puff of smoke . . . just gone! And it happened just as he crossed into that circle of clean floor around the machine.

"I immediately knew who was responsible: John Hendricks! So I went right upstairs and brought him down. I didn't bother to tell him what that machine had done to George since I was sure he knew all about it. But he surprised me by walking right into the circle and disappearing, just like George.

"Well, at least I wouldn't be bothered by that ultra-frequency sonicator of his anymore. It was a good thing I had been too careful to go anywhere near that thing.

"I began to get an idea about that machine — *it was a cleaning machine!* That's why the floor around it was so clean. Any dust or *anything* that came within the circle was either stored away somewhere or destroyed!

"A thought struck me: why not 'clean out' all of my jealous neighbors this way? It was a wonderful idea! I decided to start with the children . . .

"I went outside and, as usual, they started in with their name-calling (they always made sure to do it very softly but I could read their lips). There were about twenty of them playing in the street. I called them together and told them I was forming a club in the cellar. They all followed me down in a group. I pointed to the machine and told them that there was a gallon of chocolate ice cream behind it and that the first one to reach it could have it all. Their greedy little faces lighted up and they scrambled away in a mob.

"Three seconds later I was alone in the cellar.

"I then went around to all the other apartments in the building and told all those hateful people that their sweet little darlings were playing in the old boiler room and that I thought it was dangerous. I waited for one to go downstairs before I went to the next

door. Then I met the husbands as they came home from work and told them the same thing. And if anybody came looking for someone, I sent him down to the cellar. It was all so simple: in searching the cellar they had to cross into the circle sooner or later.

"That night I was alone in the building. It was wonderful — no laughing, no name-calling and no one sneaking into my study. Wonderful!

"A policeman came the next day. He knocked on my door and looked very surprised when I opened it. He said he was investigating a number of missing persons reports. I told him that everyone was down in the cellar. He gave me a strange look but went to check. I followed him.

"The machine was gone! Nothing was left but the circle of clean floor. I told the officer all about it, about what horrible people they were and how they deserved to disappear. He just smiled and brought me down to the station where I had to tell my story again and they sent me here to see you.

"They're still looking for my neighbors, aren't they? Won't listen when I tell them that they'll never find them. They don't believe there ever *was* a machine! But they can't find my neighbors, can they? Well, it serves them right! I told them I'm the one responsible for 'cleaning out' my apartment building but they don't believe me. Serves them *all* right!"

"See what I mean?" said Dr. Parker with the slightest trace of a smile as he turned the recorder off. "She's no help at all."

"Yeah, I know she's as looney as they come," said Burke. "But how can you explain that circle of clean floor in the boiler room with all those footprints around it?"

"Well, I can't be sure, but the 'infernal machine' is not uncommon in the paranoid's delusional system. You found no trace of an 'ultra-frequency sonicator' in the Hendricks' apartment I trust?"

Burke shook his head. "No. From what we can gather, Hen-

# **The Storm That Had To Be Stopped**

by Murray Leinster

(author of *The City of the Blind*, *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*)

ON THAT MORNING IN 1929, which saw the beginning of the Storm That Had to be Stopped, Police Inspector Hines had his life saved by an amateur driver who drove a second-hand flivver into his roadster. It was pure accident, of course. Hines's left mudguard, his left front wheel, and his front bumper were all

The warmth seemed to go out of the sun's rays...yet the sun was no darker than before. Then the storm started, the storm that was not natural, but the consequences of a man's experiments...

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As MURRAY LEINSTER, William Fitzgerald Jenkins (born 1896) is rightly considered the Dean of Science Fiction, for his first venture into science fiction, *The Runaway Skyscraper*, was published in 1919, and he has been writing science fiction, among other types of fiction, ever since; he is thus the oldest living science fiction author in continuous practice.

He also wrote for Munsey's *FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*, and in 1929 submitted a story entitled, *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*, to Editor Howard Bloomfield, along with the outlines for three sequels. Mr. Bloomfield liked the story, which would go well as a somewhat different tale for his magazine, but the three sequels, he felt, were too far out; so he suggested that the author try *ARGOSY*, instead. There all four stories were accepted and published.

*The Darkness on Fifth Avenue* originally appeared in the November 30, 1929 issue of *ARGOSY*, and was reprinted in our 5th issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, Summer 1967; the second story in the series, wherein the original situation is extended, though not greatly, *The City of the Blind*, appeared in *ARGOSY* for December 28, 1929; it was reprinted here in SMS #12, Spring 1969. The present story carries Preston's discoveries much farther, in one of the most vivid tales I've read about man-made natural catastrophes.

You'll find a most interesting chapter on Murray Leinster in Sam Moskowitz's *Seekers of Tomorrow*, published by Ballantine Books, soft cover, and I have drawn some of the data about him from that source.

wreckage when the amateur driver stared wildly about, assured himself that he was still alive, and then burst into tears.

The amateur driver passed forthwith from history. He had nothing more to do with the affair. He merely kept Hines from driving up into the Catskills in the very early morning of August 5, when, as all the world knows, the Storm began.

You will remember that morning. There had been a heat wave over all the Atlantic States for two weeks or more. The cities sweltered. The beaches were crowded. In New York, Central Park was opened to any one who chose to sleep in the open air instead of the stifling tenements.

Those who could leave the city did so. The Catskill and Adirondack hotels were packed. The seashore resorts swarmed with people.

Kathryn Bush was up in the Catskills, and Hines had started up to be with her until Monday. The fact that his car was wrecked in Yonkers almost certainly saved his life, and quite positively deter-

mined the events that followed. If he had been up in the storm-center, he would have been utterly helpless.

It was curious that the storm seemed to start so gently. Kathryn Bush wrote an account of the beginning for the *New York Star*. It was her vacation-time and she was staying in the house of Heracles Tribble, at Rosedale Farm, North Weddensdale, Greene County, New York. She expected Hines to come up, and had risen early. A room was reserved for him at the farmhouse, where there were four other boarders. She may have been sentimental, or she may have been restless. In any event she was looking out of her window when the sun rose.

While birds began to sing abstractedly in the mountain-shadows, long streaks of golden light became visible on the flanks of monster hills. The invisible sun was gilding their sides. Later, a long time later, the red disk of the sun appeared.

The sunlight was gratefully warm after the dawn-chill, though even in the first rays she thought regretfully of the blistering terrific heat that would come at midday when this same sun would be a ball of intolerable fire, hanging overhead in a brazen sky. Irrelevantly she remembered the weather forecast — fair and warmer.

And then, quite suddenly, the warmth seemed to go out of the sun's rays.

It was as sudden, as abrupt, as the turning off of a light, as the closing of a furnace door from which a fierce glare had poured forth. The sun was no darker, however. It seemed to shine as brightly as before. It did not give off heat.

Kathryn stared about her. She looked back at the sun. It glowed vividly, but it seemed obscurely to have changed color. She held out her hand to it to catch the warmth of its rays. There was none.

A cloud over its face? No. The sky was wholly clear. There was simply no more heat coming from the sun.

Puzzled, but quite unalarmed, it seemed to Kathryn that the sun's ruddy tint had vanished very suddenly. It even seemed as if instead of a normal gold, the great disk had taken on a faint bluish

or greenish tint. The change — if it was a change — was so slight that she could not be sure.

The seeming lack of heat was so extraordinary that, instead of turning away, she gazed and gazed, and presently took a tiny reading-glass and focused it on a bit of paper. The paper should have turned brown and burned luridly. Nothing happened.

More curious still, now, she focused the light upon her hand; then upon the sensitive skin of her forearm. A vivid spot of light formed at the focus of the lens. The speck of flesh seemed white-hot. But there was not the faintest, not the tiniest sensation of heat.

It was at just this time she noticed that a wind was blowing far away. Where she stood at her window, looking eastward, the air was utterly calm. Her window, as a matter of fact was open wide. But she suddenly saw trees, a long distance off, bending and tossing furiously as if in a gale of wind. There was a long straight stretch of white road reaching far away toward infinity. A cloud of dust was racing along it.

"It's wind!" said Kathryn vaguely. Still she stared. Then she saw something rolling crazily across a distant pasture. It was a smother of dust and debris. But there was one gigantic, darker object that rolled and rolled. She saw suddenly that it was the top of a tree, sheared off from its trunk in some freak of wind-pressure, and rolling like a monster ball.

The wind struck a farmhouse three miles down the valley. Kathryn saw a fence-line disappear. The dwelling leaned and leaned.

It sank quite gently to a sloping mass of wreckage, save that its roof went ballooning off insanely and mowed down a lane of trees through a planted orchard before it crashed against an upward-jutting outcrop of granite and was torn to bits about it.

When the wind struck the house from which Kathryn had watched it, the windows were all down. She had shouted of a storm approaching. Clouds, too, began suddenly to appear in writhing, ominous masses. The house had been closed tightly by the agitated Mr. Heracles Tribble, who hastened out to his hen-hous-



es to see to their security before the storm came, and did not come back.

Kathryn watched from the window. The rolling cloud of dust that was the forefront of the wind drew nearer with incredible speed. As it drew close, the monstrous size of the disturbance became apparent. It was hundreds of feet high, and it was rolling over and over upon itself like a monstrous comber.

There seemed even to be striations in it like those stranding of a rope will make. But there were objects carried in the smoke-colored rolling cloud. Dark objects, of all shapes and sizes. Kathryn, staring and almost paralyzed by sheer astonishment, saw the tree-



limbs and it seemed even whole trees caught up in the monstrous turmoil.

Somehow her eyes swept to the hen-houses at the rear of the house. Mr. Heracles Tribble was standing in the open, peculiarly puny and ineffective, staring incredulously at the thing that bore down upon him. He was small, and rotund, and bald. He wore silver-rimmed spectacles, and he stared at a rolling wave of smoke and dust and utter destruction, hundreds of feet high, that swept toward him irresistibly.

Mr. Heracles Tribble turned suddenly, and fled toward the house. Kathryn saw his mouth dropped open in horror. He ran



with incredible speed. But the rolling cloud of dust and debris had reached the pasture-lot. It touched the hen-houses and they vanished as if blown to atoms.

Unpausing, the monstrous thing came rolling up. Its bellying edge was over the house while its base had still not yet touched the running little fat man. But then Kathryn saw smoke-like dust envelop him. She saw — or thought she saw — that he rose crazily from the ground. And then the wave of wind struck the house.

It was absurd, but Kathryn was not frightened even the instant after she knew the wind had struck. Her first conscious thought was that the house had been lifted away from around her, leaving her untouched.

Then she realized that the house still stood. There was no roof over her head, to be sure, but the walls remained intact. The feeling of being in the open air came from the fact that without warning or a sound that could be heard above the deafening uproar of the wind, the windows had ceased to be. The glass panes broke out of them with no more disturbance than so many breaking bubble-films would have made.

Kathryn had been at one moment safely housed, behind glass panes. The next instant she was merely sheltered behind a thick brick wall while a dense fog of dust blotted out even the farther side of the room.

Something crashed into that farther wall and kicked feebly. It was a pig, picked up no one could guess where and carried no one can guess how far. Then a tree-trunk thrust itself through the brick wall, horribly splintered, and heaved upward, tearing the wall apart, and then somehow went reeling off into the thick dust-cloud.

Kathryn put her hand to her throat. Sheer professional training alone saved her from panic. The newspaper woman's acquired instinct said: "What a story! I've got to get to safety. It will be a big story when the wind stops — and I saw it!"

She dropped to the floor and began to crawl past the window toward the stairway. Once she ventured a little distance away

from the wall, and a solid stream of air — as solid as a board — that came through a window, rolled her over and over until she struck with a crash against the leeward wall.

It held her there, then she battled her way on hands and knees down the stairs. The wind beat at her terribly, trying to fling her up again. It came in through the smashed lower windows.

She saw the dining room table flat against the wall. Its top covered a window and it was held in place by the wind-pressure. It was very probably that measure of protection which enabled her to pass so close to the leeward wall without being picked up and hurled off into nothingness.

She heard a terrific crash upstairs, in the room she had just left. Fragments of brick came down the steps. She reached the cellar stairs, tumbled down them, and heard more terrific crashes still.

Then there was darkness, while the wind roared by overhead. The noise the wind made was not a hum, not a whistle, not a shriek. It was a steady, a terrible, deep-toned roar. That roaring of the wind was characteristic, throughout, of the Storm That Had to be Stopped.

## 2

HINES HAD STARTED OUT at five o'clock in the morning, in hopes of getting away from the city before the heavy traffic began. But, of course, he turned out to be only one of many thousands who had the same idea. The heat wave in New York had been terrific. It is recorded that the traffic had piled up as early as 3 A.M., and when Hines started at five he was promptly swallowed up in a long lane of cars going up-State at a bare crawl.

His accident happened just out of Yonkers at a little after six, but it was nine before his wheel was replaced and a new mudguard in position. By that time the Storm had begun.

Down there, quite sixty miles from the storm-center, its development was less spectacular. Up among the mountains it is fairly certain that the wind began at a very few minutes after six. Watches found on victims of the first terrific rush of wind were

almost invariably stopped at that hour, and clocks in houses, overturned and crushed, corroborate the figures. But it was nearly half past six when a strong wind began to blow from Yonkers toward the mountains.

The sun was just up. Hines was seething over the delay. He was engaged to Kathryn, and he resented anything that kept him away from her. The Catskills had been his suggestion in the first place. Kathryn, as a feature writer on the *Star*, didn't want to get too far from New York anyhow.

Other matters aside, there was a man named Preston who was rather definitely dangerous and who was still at large. Not less than twice, with his artificial darkness, he had set the whole city of New York by the ears, to his own enormous profit.

Hines, and Schaaf — now up in the Catskills, too, making some abstruse experiments with very short Hertzian waves for the research department of the American Electric Company — Hines and Schaaf had managed to checkmate him each time.

Each time Kathryn had been in at the death, and each time the *Star* had scored a newspaper triumph. With Preston still at large, and both Hines and Schaaf convinced that sooner or later he would try to strike again, Kathryn had not wanted to get too far away even on her vacation. She wanted to handle the next battle with Preston for the *Star* as she had the first two.

Hines moved restlessly about the garage, or scowled at the never-ending but often passing line of cars that went crawling, crawling, creeping away from the heat of the city.

Those cars were leaving a sweltering city behind them, to steam upon sweltering roads in an atmosphere of exhaust-fumes, but at least they had hopes of reaching the hills and coolness. Instead, only too many of them reached the hills and disaster.

Hines noticed a breeze at twenty after six. At half past it was a wind. At seven, it was half a gale, blowing under a clear sky with a brazen sun already sending down a blistering heat.

Hines swore under his breath, but it was no use trying to hurry the mechanics. He was an inspector of police in the city of New York, but at a roadside garage he was merely a customer, and the

traffic outside promised plenty of customers before the day was over.

It was shortly after eight that Hines saw the top of an ancient touring car torn to ribbons by the wind. Before nine o'clock came, he had seen dozens of them.

The traffic began to thin, abruptly. Cars headed for the mountains turned aside. They began to fight their way into storage garages, battling a terrific, solid mass of air.

Some of them stopped where trees on a side-road promised some measure of protection from the wind. Others were wiser and parked themselves in swarming masses wherever deep cuts or valleys ran across the prevailing direction of the wind.

The galvanized garage roof was a drumming tumult, now, rattling and booming from the wind that went sweeping across it. The mechanics finished Hines's car and very reluctantly opened the doors — closed a half hour before — to let him out.

He came out into a rather incredible world. Trees were leaning toward the mountains. The roads were nearly clear. The traffic had lessened almost to nothing. The noise of the wind was a distinct deep booming sound, to which the tortured trees added shrill whistles and shriller screams, and now and then sharp cracking sounds as limbs or trunks gave way under the intolerable pressure.

Hines turned toward the mountains and shifted gears. They clashed, horribly. It was seconds before he realized that the wind had pushed his car ahead of the motor-speed. He had to race it again to get into third.

The car seemed to be possessed of unlimited power. It sped toward the mountains like a mad thing. Every man comes to know his motor, but Hines found his own car acting like a thing possessed. With his foot off the accelerator it made forty-five miles an hour. The barest touch on the gas-pedal sent it leaping to sixty, seventy miles.

He saw an ancient flivver turned over, at the side of the road. There were no people near it. He braked, instinctively, and found his brakes nearly useless. His car flashed past, and he heard the brakes squealing, but felt hardly any diminution of his speed.

There was a ripping sound behind him. His back curtain had blown in. The split upper half of the windshield opened out, and wind poured from behind him out over the front. Another wreck. Two more.

He saw a car coming toward him and passed it with the speed of light, but in the instant of his passing saw the man at the wheel of that other vehicle working frantically at gas-lever and throttle, and it seemed to him that for the fraction of a second he heard the roaring of a motor laboring horribly in low gear, battling against the wind alone.

The road shot into a deep cut, and the abnormal acceleration of the car diminished. Hines jammed on the brakes and stopped with difficulty. The ripped fragments of his back curtain were flapping about him and he got out his knife and cut them away.

Now he felt the wind as a savage, gusty pressure. It was terrifically strong, even down here in a cut some thirty feet deep. Something was stirring in Hines's breast, just then, which he was grimly refusing to recognize. After all, there have been storms and storms. Kathryn, up in the mountains, would be safe enough.

The thin tooting of a horn came to him. A car had drawn aside from the road, some fifty or sixty feet ahead. A man in it was waving to him to come on ahead. Hines merely released his brakes and his car moved sluggishly for twenty feet and stopped. He put it in gear for the rest of the distance.

Here, remarkably, the air was calm. The man in the other car was smoking placidly. Overhead the wind rushed past with its deep, ominous roaring sound. At just this point between the sides of the cut there was a perfect lee, where no wind-currents of any sort were noticeable.

"I thought I'd tip yuh," said the man in the other car. "This is the best place I've hit yet. Pull over off the road an' you'll be all right. Better get off the road, though. A car come through here like a bat out o' hell. Turned over at the end of the cut, yonder. The wind's near crosswise there."

Instinct made Hines ask: "Anybody hurt?"

The man spat. "Hell! They fell out an' the wind picked 'em up

an' carried 'em off somewhere. Ain't it a wind, though? What y' call a hurricane, I guess."

Hines was staring, oblivious. Far, far away, a cloud was forming, but unlike any cloud Hines had ever seen before. Something, the sheer distance of the formation perhaps, told him that it was higher than any cloud he had known. It rose as a vast, incredible column, and then it spread out as a mushroom might spread above its stalk.

"Yeah," said the man in the other car. "It's been like that for half an hour, now. Looks like a volcano cloud, but it ain't. No earth shocks. Just wind. I reckon that's the storm center. It's a peach, this storm. That cloud'll be over the Catskills, somewhere."

Hines started, and then he turned grimly to his car-top. He slashed at it, wrenching away the cloth and flinging it away. "I'm going on," he said, rather absurdly.

The man in the other car shrugged. "I ain't stopping you," he observed. "But you better stay here. That wind is a hell-cat. If you want your car to stay on the road an' you're bound to go, load 'er down with rocks. Plenty of 'em. I mean that wind 'll blow you clean to hell and gone if you don't."

Hines's brain was busy with a real, an acknowledged terror now, but something in the suggestion jerked at his mind. "Right," he said suddenly. "Thanks. I'll do it. I believe it's needed."

The other man unfastened his car-door and stepped out. "I'll help," he said amiably.

In silence they worked. The empty seat beside the driver was filled with boulders and smaller rocks. All the floor-space filled up. Hines flung up the back of the rumble seat and they filled it with stones of smaller size.

"One more tip," said the other man thoughtfully. "Some flat rocks alongside your hood 'll help."

They found two huge stones, loosened by the dynamite that had made the cut. They wedged them in between the mudguards and the hood. Hines held out his hand. There was a bill in it.

"Go to hell," said the other man cheerfully. "Me, I'm a social-

ist and a proletarian, an' judging by your car you're a damn' capitalist — a bourgeois anyways. But one guy can help out another one, can't he?"

Hines put away the bill and shook hands instead. "My girl's up there in the mountains," he said briefly. "I'm going up to see if she's all right."

"Good luck!"

Hines's car, with its top gone and its windshield laid flat before it, went into low gear with a vast groaning. It was burdened with over half a ton of stone. It went into second with a little difficulty. Then the wind began to make itself felt. Despite its added weight, the car went into high gear quite normally. It was rolling along at twenty miles an hour when it came out of the cut into the full blast of the wind again.

Hines was flung against the side door. The car shuddered horribly. Gasping for breath, with his head bent over, his hat gone instantly, Hines fought to keep it on the road. There was a curve here, and for two hundred yards he went squarely across the wind. Without the rocks, no vehicle ever built would have stayed on the road in such a blast.

Then the road turned again and the wind was behind him once more. Instantly the car picked up speed. Thirty, thirty-five, forty miles an hour. Forty-five miles — fifty—

The landscape flashed past, a mass of wrecked trees and debris. Hines saw the body of a motor truck a full hundred yards from the road, smashed against a rocky hillside. He saw two, three, a dozen cars overturned —always on the side of the road to which the wind would have flung them. He came to a town, which was neatly obliterated. Wreckage littered the streets. He jammed on the brakes, raced his motor, got it into second and slowed by the braking action of the engine. He raced it again and got into first and turned off his switch.

He was going no more than fifteen miles an hour when the car careened over a heap of rubbish which once had been part of a building, swung about insanely and crashed where splintered planks had piled up against a massive stone wall.

It was part of a road tunnel underneath a railroad track.

Then Hines saw a man crawling on the pavement before him. The man had a rope about his waist, which was evidently tied to something. A paintpot slopped white paint about as he pushed it ahead of him. He was painting huge letters on the concrete roadway.

**HINES STOP!**  
**HINES STOP!**  
**HINES STO**

That was as far as he had gone. He was painfully working on the last letter of the third "Stop" when Hines slid out, gasping for breath, and dropped flat on his belly on the road. He went crawling about the splintered planks to windward until the man saw him. Then he shouted, uselessly, while the man stared.

It was not until Hines had pointed repeatedly to his name and then to himself that comprehension slowly dawned on the crawling man's face. The fellow waved and shouted an order across the ten feet of intervening space, then hauled himself along the rope in the very teeth of the wind to a doorway in the side of the road-tunnel. Seconds later he was out again with another rope. He flung it into the air, and the wind stretched it taut.

Hines crawled, knotted it about his body, and felt himself hauled across the road.

For the second time he was in a blessed calm. He stood up, panting. The man who had been painting on the road made a peculiarly absurd salute.

"You're Police Inspector Hines, sir?" he asked woodenly.

Hines nodded, still unable to speak.

"Corporal Woodford of the State Police, sir," said the man who had pulled Hines across the road by a rope. "All wires are down, sir, but every broadcasting station that hasn't been wrecked has been broadcasting orders to every possible agency to stop you from going into the storm.

"Professor Schaaf managed to get a message out by radio, sir,



from a spot very near the storm-center. He says that the storm is caused by Preston's darkness-apparatus, and that you are the only man able to stop it. And the storm, sir, simply has to be stopped. Will you step inside and give your instructions?"

Hines blinked, and then the meaning of the message came to him. Rage filled him, consumingly. And then he went sick with helplessness. Because, of course, he could have no instructions to give for the stopping of a storm.

## 3

UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, it is probable that the little room in which Hines found himself would have seemed extraordinarily cramped and crowded.

It was perhaps eight feet by ten, certainly no more, and it was inset in a railroad fill which here was pierced for a vehicular roadway. A door opened upon the curbstone, and from the narrow doorstep it was no more than ten feet to the painted white line which normally marked the center of the road.

On the farther side of the railroad embankment there was another concrete highway, which explained the presence of the room. Here was a dangerous crossroad, and this little cubby-hole was a shelter for the State policemen.

There was a tiny stove, and a bench along one side of the wall, and a cupboard and a table. There were nails, from which a slicker, a belt with a holster attached, and a patched motorcycle inner tube depended. On the table a tiny radio blared forth intermittent sounds from an even tinier loudspeaker.

"To all authorities in New York State," said a voice crisply. "All traffic must be stopped where the wind has now reached a velocity of forty miles an hour. The storm is expected to increase in intensity until four o'clock this afternoon. Wherever possible the population must be warned of this fact. The storm will lessen markedly at about sunset and may have ceased entirely by morning.

"It is imperative also that Inspector of Police Hines be reached

and warned not to enter the storm area. Where practicable, signs should be painted on stone walls or the pavement. 'Hines Stop! will be enough to cause Inspector Hines to stop and make inquiry. He will probably travel one of the following roads—"

Hines turned to his companion, who was busily raking together a heap of wires from the drawer of the table and twisting them together into a single long strand.

"I'm getting a buzzer signal ready," said the State trooper woodenly, "to use the railroad rails overhead. The radio said half an hour ago that all State troopers were to use buzzer signals and railroad tracks where they couldn't report otherwise. Not many of us left, sir, and very few of us can report, anyhow. I didn't bother with that until I'd put up signs to stop you, sir."

The radio had finished a long list of highways. It began again, repeating the previous message word for word, while wind roared overhead in a deep-toned bellow which did not seem to vary by the fraction of a semitone. It was rising slowly in pitch, as a matter of fact, but so slowly that Hines's ears could not follow the change.

"This is an emergency means of communication, sir," said the trooper, joining wires together with painstaking care. "It's the old buzzer line that used to be used in the Army. I take an induction coil, the one from my motorcycle, sir, and put the secondary into the rail up overhead. The rail's iron, sir, and it isn't insulated, and it's not very efficient, but they can pick it up with amplifiers at the other end."

He bent two wires and fastened them to the storage-battery which ran his radio. He was busy for a minute or more, improvising a make-and-break contact.

The trooper put it down, satisfied, and tied a rope about himself. "We have ropes here, sir, for towing," he observed. "I'm going out with the wire, sir, and try to fasten this to the railroad rail. If I'm blown away, sir, will you try to haul me back?"

"Wait a bit," said Hines shortly. "I'm going to do that. I don't know Morse code; and you're needed for signaling. I'll make the connection...It's my order," he added sharply as the trooper shook his head.

Reluctantly, the trooper gave him the rope-end.

Hines knotted the rope tightly about his body and stepped out of the door. Wind struck him, and took his breath away. But that was the wind that blew through the relatively sheltered traffic-way. He was crawling on his belly when he came out on the lee side of the railroad fill, and a monstrous eddy of wind lifted him six inches off the ground and flung him crashing ten feet away. He gasped, and began to crawl desperately up the incline toward the rails.

The wind, here, had formed a monstrous whirl over the slight obstruction. The dried cinders, dust, and small stones which once had covered the side of the embankment had long since been sucked up and flung madly away. It was naked damp clay that smeared him as he crawled toward the tracks.

He seemed to be weightless, as the windwhirl tried to lift him upward. Hines had been in the Great War, and he thought that he had learned to hug the ground, but never before in his life had he clung so deperately to the earth as he did now. He was blinded, strangled.

There was a vast, malevolent force pulling and tugging at his body. And then quite suddenly his fingers scraped concrete, and he fought the wind that strove to push his exploring hand aside and found a steel signal-post that must be beside the track.

It was that post that really made it possible for him to reach the rails. The blast that came over the top of the embankment was as fierce, as savage, as nearly irresistible as a flood of swiftly-flowing water. Nobody knows what velocity the wind ultimately attained in the Storm, but it had reached a hundred and forty miles an hour when the self-registering anemometer in the Burton observatory was wrecked.

Hines faced that wind, and fought his way inch by inch by means of the steel bands connecting the signal-post to the rails. An outstretched arm caught the wind. The sleeve ballooned out and burst. A flapping end was seized by the wind and the rest of the garment was literally peeled from him.

Here, of course, the wind was at its worst as far as Hines was

concerned. He was protected by no more than the four-inch steel rail from its full force, and constantly there poured over him dust, smaller fragments of debris, and above all and over all the overpoweringly dense and solid wind itself.

When the connection was made, Hines was sobbing with sheer exhaustion. He slid back down the incline, an inch at a time. And then suddenly the wind caught him, and he felt himself lifted up. The rope about his body tightened and hurt intolerably, and then he felt a crash and lost consciousness.

When he came back to himself he was lying on the floor in the little eight-by-ten room again and the State trooper was working the buzzer signal steadily. He stopped, and came over to Hines.

Hines stirred, and the trooper nodded to himself. He went back to the buzzer and worked it again.

The radio broke off in the midst of its tediously repeated message.

"Corporal Woodford!" said the loud-speaker crisply. "Since Inspector Hines has recovered consciousness, we will give him the message from Professor Schaaf. He is in communication with the American Electric Company by means of a short-wave set, and we will rebroadcast it to you."

There were clickings. One or two curious crashing noises. Then a reenforcement of the roaring of the storm, only this extra roaring came from the speaker. It was evident that wherever Schaaf was speaking into a microphone, the storm was there too.

"Hello, Hines," said the placid voice of Schaaf. "This is a fery pleasant situation, I dontd think. Now I giff you der works, and you use your head. Here is what I haff found out.

"At six this morning der sun changed color. From where I am, I obserfe with a spectroscope that der infra-red part of the sun spectrum is completely gone cuckoo. I haff examined electric lights in der same manner, and der infra-red spectrum is missing there, also.

"Der air where I am no longer transmits radiant heat. Der air, in other words, is opaque to heat-wafes, as our friend Breston has been able to make it opaque to light. I think he is up to some more

of his deffilment. As you remember, he was able to make der air absorb and neutralize light, producing his infernal darkness.

"I conclude that he has contrified to make der air absorb heat instead of permitting it to come on down to der ground, and in consequence der air within range of his sending apparatus is getting hot as der deffil because it is absorbing all der heat that should pass through it to warm the earth. Getting hot, it expands and rises. More cool air is rushing in underneath. That, in turn, is getting excited and rushing to der upper stratosphere.

"Der result is der Storm, that is raising hell. From der communications I haff received from der American Electric Company, der storm-center is fifty miles across, which makes it a hell of a storm. Der aferage for a typhoon is ten to fifteen miles.

"Der information I haff for you is that it is definitely Breston who is making this storm. He has a sending-apparatus with a range of twenty to thirty miles in efery direction. Where his *verdammt* short wafes reach, der air is no longer transparent to heat wafes and all der heat of der sun is being used to heat der atmosphere, instead the earth. There is bractically a chimney fifty miles across, full of hot air which is rising toward heafen and raising hell.

"You can locate der sending-station with apparatus like we used to line up der source of der darkness, before. I will be in communication with der Electric Company for some time to come. You can reach me, of course. But be careful as der deffil how you talk. Breston is no doubt listening in.

"I don't know what you are going to do, or how you are going to do it, but you haff got to do something. Der chimney of hot air will stop working, of course at sunset. But it will probably begin again at sunrise, and in der meantime there will be der deffil of a storm all night long because of der hell that was raised all day. Good luck, Hines, I sign off now."

There were more clickings and the storm-roar from the loud-speaker stopped. Then the crisp voice of the announcer came once more.

"Mr. Hines! I hope you received Professor Schaaf's message.

Woodford's communications are coming through quite clearly. It is not yet known just where you are. If you will send word, every effort will be made to reach you. In the meantime, will you give what orders you can about preparations for stopping this storm?"

The trooper, with his improvised key poised, looked expectantly at Hines.

"My messages are getting through, sir," he said woodenly. "And I imagine that they can't be read by anybody except at the other end of the rails. Before you recovered consciousness, the commissioner of police in New York City broadcast a message giving you full authority. The State authorities have done the same. What shall I tell them you want done?"

Hines's hands were clenched tightly. Kathryn was up in the mountains somewhere, somewhere near the center of the storm which was Preston's work. Preston's work!

She was probably dead by this time. Few buildings could stand the blast that blew outside. There was nothing to do now, but get Preston.

Preston was the one man on earth that Hines unfeignedly hated. He had seen the man once. He had fought him twice, with the scientist Schaaf's aid. Preston should have been one of the greatest scientific geniuses on earth, but instead had now made himself the most cold-blooded murderer in history.

Preston found that certain short Hertzian waves produced a state of fluorescence in the air\* so that the visible waves of light were absorbed by the ions of the atmosphere, and an utter darkness was produced.

Once, some months before, he had sent a beam of those waves down Fifth Avenue, in New York. In fifteen minutes of utter blackness the forewarned underworld of the city reaped a harvest of which Preston received his share.

\*The fluorescence of atmospheric air under the influence of certain wave-length of radiation was described as long ago as 1911 in a lecture before the Royal Institution of Great Britain by Professor R.W. Wood of Johns Hopkins University. The very short rays discovered by Schumann were demonstrated to produce fluorescence in air. The experiments and a photograph of the phenomenon may be found reprinted in the Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1911, which is available in many public libraries. See page 165 *et seq.*

With every resource of science and courage, Hines and Schaaf had fought him then, and had won. His apparatus for producing darkness was destroyed, and he seemed to have been killed. It was that success that had won Hines promotion to an inspectorship of police.

Preston, however, was not dead. Three months since, he had reappeared with a new and larger apparatus for the broadcasting of his short waves. He filled the whole city with the unbelievably high-frequency broadcast, and the air above the whole metropolitan district absorbed all visible rays and transformed them into invisible heat. The whole city was immersed in an ocean of oblivion.

Again Hines had fought him, with Schaaf's assistance. That bulky blond German scientist had invented instruments for locating the source of this radiation which had an almost catalytic effect in producing darkness. The effect of the waves was out of all proportion to the power used in producing them.

By Schaaf's instruments and Hines's courage, again the menace to the city had been nullified; but Preston had gone scot-free, and had become a millionaire through the panic in the stock-market his horrible weapon had caused.

He remained undiscovered and at large, and his captured apparatus had been destroyed by the explosion of an evidently prepared bomb before it could be examined.

Now he was again at work. He had prepared apparatus which could send over a circle from fifty to sixty miles across. Wherever that station maintained a field of force of the extremely short radio waves, there the effects of the unholy radiation were evident.

He seemed to be using now a slightly different wave length than had caused all light radiation to be absorbed by the air. Now it was that all heat was arrested by the atmosphere. The warmth of the sun did not reach the earth. The air itself became heated instead. Heated, it rose, and created a cyclonic storm beyond all parallel.

Preston, in the midst of that storm, was as safe from any danger save that of the storm as if he were protected by armies. No man

could reach him alive. He was invulnerable, protected by the sheer destruction he had invoked.

Hines clenched his hands in the cubby-hole dug in the railroad embankment. His eyes narrowed. Kathryn was very probably dead, and Preston still lived. Preston would have to be killed for the sake of humanity alone; yet Hines would kill him to avenge her only.

"First," said Hines in a cold and utterly bitter tone, "I want everybody who's sold stocks short for a week past to be checked up. Preston will be operating in terms of millions. I suggest that the stock-market be closed, because when it's closed he can have no motive to continue the storm. And then—"

He paused to marshal his thoughts, while rage pumped in every artery and an almost insane hatred maddened him.

"Then," he said harshly, "I want the biggest tanks in the United States Army to be sent up here as soon as the wind dies down a little. They'll have to travel under their own power, because the roads and railroads alike are useless. I want the big forty-ton ones. I want at least, two gun-carrier tanks with six-inch guns and a supply of gas and high explosive shell. And I want some bombs."

He went on to list cables, more bombs, and airplane photo maps of all the Catskills.

Meanwhile the Storm increased in force. It had been unbelievable before. Now the wind reached an intensity hitherto unknown upon the earth.

4

**WHEN SUNSET CAME** and the Storm died down temporarily, it had left its marks all over a circle of territory a full thousand miles of diameter. The damage done ranged from a mere blowing-down of signs at the edge of that circle, to the absolutely unparalleled devastation of the territory immediately about the stormcenter.

In the center, of course, the damage was terrific. Forests, hous-



es, hamlets, towns, all were leveled to the ground. Yet, there were survivors. Cellars protected some, as did valleys and hollows. Probably four or five thousand people lived through it.

The fifty-mile circle of the storm-center was devastated, but it was not destroyed. And beyond the storm-center, where the wind had not reached its ultimate velocity, the amount of damage was neatly proportioned to the distance from the focus of the storm.

But about the edge of that central area — the space Schaaf had spoken of as the chimney — there was a ringlike strip of utter desolation, five to fifteen miles wide.

Every particle of vegetation had been swept away by the sheer force of the wind. The fields were bare even of grass. In spots apparently even the topsoil had dried to dust and gone sweeping away into oblivion in the storm-wind. The forests were shattered areas of splintered stumps. The houses had left as traces only small mounds of masonry, or else no signs at all.

The storm died down at sunset and for half an hour there was almost peace. But the vast chimney of sunheated air which shot upward for miles had acted as a vacuum, drawing to itself air from every direction with terrific speed. When the vacuum abruptly ceased to be, the winds continued to blow for a time from sheer momentum, and piled up a colossal high-pressure system which was as intolerable as the previous storm-center had been.

Over all the North Atlantic States, then, there was atmospheric chaos. Dense clouds formed at nightfall. Rain in unexampled volume fell, while electric storms wrought havoc. In the Catskill section mountain streams, choked with the debris of the wind's creation, became flooded with falling water and abruptly turned to inundations.

In that terrible strip of desolation about the storm-center itself, the bare, stripped earth turned to a vast morass of mud. And that morass claimed victims when survivors in the central area tried to cross it during the darkness and the rain.

At nine o'clock, rain was falling in sheets, in columns, almost in solid masses. Lurid, unbelievable bolts of lightning leaped from one horizon to the other.

There were no electric lights, of course, in two thousand square miles of New York State that night. Beneath monstrous clouds which poured floods upon the earth, there was only blackness, save at one spot. There, pencil-beams of light stabbed futilely at the falling rain, where twelve huge tanks rocked and lurched and slid on up toward the mountains.

They had stopped in their advance and picked up Hines. He sat up in the control room of the largest of all of them, and asked dreary questions and dully gave instructions which organized an attack.

The tanks would go on up toward the site of the storm-center. They would gather, presently, and Hines would give instructions which would be final. Then they would scatter to their several strategic points.

With dawn, when the Storm That Had to be Stopped began again, they would use the instruments Schaaf had originally designed for determining the point of origin of certain other short waves. They would find Preston's station. It would probably be a dugout underground, for the safety from the storm he could create at will. The tanks would bomb that station mercilessly. Or if he had intrenched himself upon a mountain peak, the gun-carrying caterpillars would come into action. Six-inch guns would assail a solitary man who essayed to devastate the earth.

Only colossal things such as they were — weighing forty tons each — could hope to exist and move in the atmospheric turmoil that would begin with sunrise.

The tanks rumbled and lurched as they made their way in a sedate long line toward the hills. Rain poured in rivulets from the steel sides. Sheets and masses of falling water scattered the beams from the searchlights mounted upon them. From the control-room it was possible to see perhaps twenty feet with some clarity, and dimly for thirty feet more. But after that even the searchlight glare was dissipated by the rain.

Hines looked weary and worn and haggard. All day long he had

been in communication with New York, giving orders which men leaped to obey.

The State had given him full authority. He had shown his ability. Besides, the scale, the scope of this disaster was one to induce panic. The leadership of Hines, who had twice defeated Preston, would restore some confidence in a public otherwise more than inclined to be panic-stricken.

These were army tanks, shipped on flat-cars as far as the rails were undamaged, drawn by a locomotive that had crept on and on, as far as it dared, while the Storm still blew in the daytime. They had come at full speed immediately darkness fell.

Now they went lurching and pounding up toward the hills. The clanking of their mighty treads was thunderous in their reverberating interiors. The roaring of their motors was deafening.

They were full of the smell of hot oil and exhaust-gases and fuel, but up in the control-room the lightning and thunder blotted out all sights and sounds, and the sheer desert of mud over which they traveled toward the hills made it impossible for any man who saw it to think of anything else.

Hines, alone, thought of Kathryn. The awful desolation over which the tanks traveled had been covered with farms and houses and forests only twelve hours before. People had lived here — people who now were torn and draggled corpses flung haphazard amid the other debris of the Storm.

Hines had been cooped up for twelve hours knowing his helplessness, knowing that Kathryn was either dead or desperately in need of help. Now, he was sure, she was dead. The desert of mud over which the tanks passed was enough to convince him of her death.

The radio had told them that over most of the United States the wind had reached gale intensity.

The weather bureau in Washington was working like mad to predict the unpredictable, but from the one day's storm alone weeks of chaotic weather could be foreseen.

Already meteorologists were speculating upon the effect of the Storm upon the climate of Europe. California, it was certain,

would be visited by subsidiary hurricanes, and from Texas on north there would be cyclonic whirls of terrible intensity as the air of the earth moved to fill up the vacuum Preston could create at will.

What news there was of the loss of life was so monstrous as to have lost all meaning. The record of towns destroyed, of villages wiped out, became monotonous. From the standpoint of property destroyed the Storm was one of the major catastrophes of history; and if the death toll was lighter than certain plagues and earthquakes, it was only because the larger cities were fortunately far from the circles of highest wind-velocity.

The feel of slippery mud beneath the tanks' great treads changed subtly. The earth became curiously more solid. A great boulder appeared not far from the leading tank's track, glistening and running with rain. The tank changed course to avoid it. Hines looked back. Despite the falling water, he could detect a long lane of white glows, which were the searchlights of the following tanks.

The tanks still went on. They were in what seemed to be a semi-solid mass of water, intermittently made into a greenish universe of lights by lightning-flashes which were blurred by the rain to mere indefinite illumination. In the periods of darkness between those flashes, the searchlights gleamed brightly ahead. And water poured from the tanks in floods.

Debris appeared, water-soaked and shredded. The stumps of wind-whipped, obliterated Indian corn began suddenly to the left. The treads of the tanks clanked suddenly on concrete. There was a road beneath the leading tank.

A speaking-tube whistled in the leading tank. "Headquarters," came up thinly to the control-room, "orders you try to locate yourself by road signs or any other evidences of position."

The officer in command of the tank snorted and made no answer.

The tank went on. There was concrete under the left tread only. The tank wallowed around and climbed back on the road. It went rumbling blindly on in the rain. Presently bare concrete was visible. Mud had not washed across it here.

"There!" said Hines sharply. "A road-sign bent over by the wind! It's in place!"

An unearthly hooting set up. The tank stopped with a grinding noise. Hines peered out of the little vision-slits and saw a dripping man with a flashlight bent over something by the side of the road. It was one of the cast-iron road sign one finds in the Catskills. They are set up on wrought-iron posts, which are fixed in concrete.

Originally the sturdiness of construction was made necessary by the vandal habits of a motoring populace, but it served a useful purpose now. Set facing the wind, the cast-iron plate had caught the full blast. And the wrought-iron shaft had bent slowly but definitely until the sign lay nearly flat, facing upward.

The dripping soldier came sprinting back into the tank. The speaking-tube whistled again. "The sign says 'North Weddensdale Corporate Limits,' sir."

Hines clenched his hands. This was the village where Kathryn had been staying! He strained his eyes desperately through the rain.

A rectangular hole to the left of the concrete caught his eye. It was a cellar. The house had been taken cleanly away from above it. Nothing was left. Nothing. "Go on," he said hoarsely.

The tank ground into motion again. Rain poured from its sides. Its searchlight ray stabbed into the darkness and was dissipated by falling water.

Then the searchlight ray went out.

Almost instantly thereafter the speakingtube whistled. "All the tanks, sir, report their searchlights have gone out."

The officer commanding the leading tank swore to himself. "All right. Everybody stop and repair them."

Hines heard his voice speaking hoarsely: "It's the Darkness. The metal walls of the tank act as shields, so we can see inside, but it's the Darkness — the same darkness Preston turned on in New York. If you send a man outside to make sure, keep up a noise so he can find his way back."

Hines went, himself, to the exit door of the tank. He heard two

men moving about inside. The interior of the tank was brightly lighted, and the door was opened wide, but the light from inside did not strike upon the earth beneath the tank. It seemed to be absorbed by some solid black substance which surrounded the metal monster and stretched solidly almost with an inward bulge, across the open door.

Thunder shook the earth. There was a crashing and crackling of electricity. From the violence of the report, the lightning-flash must have struck some where near by. But there was no faintest flickering of light.

Then, in a peculiarly ghastly fashion, a groping hand came out of the solid wall of blackness across the tank's exit door. It seemed disembodied, detached from any body. It caught at the edge of the door. A man came, wild-eyed and staring, out of the apparently solid opacity. His teeth chattered as he swung into the illuminated tank.

"The — the flashlight don't work," he gasped. "I held it up to my eyes and it just glowed, but it don't give any light. See?"

He pressed the button. A brilliant gleam shot from the flashlight. His jaw dropped open. But Hines nodded his head very bitterly.

The Storm had been made by the broadcasting of very short Hertzian waves which caused the atmosphere to be opaque to heat; a mere variation of a device that Preston had used before. Now he had gone back to the use of his first device again.

Now, from somewhere within a thirty-mile radius, he was broadcasting short waves differing perhaps by the fraction of a millimeter in length from those that had produced the Storm. And these tiny ripples in the ether caused the absorption of all that band of frequencies which made visible light.

There was darkness outside the tanks so dense as to be tangible, so complete as to constitute utter blindness, so thick that it caused the perfect absorption of even ten thousand candle-power search-light beams within a distance of three feet.

Hines thought grimly, staring at the apparently solid wall of darkness without the door. The metal walls of the tanks, of

course, absorbed and grounded the waves the impinged upon them. The darkness could not invade the tanks themselves. But it blinded the drivers beyond the possibility of a remedy.

The engines of the tank stopped suddenly. The officer in command swung down from the control-room, his lips twisted wryly.

"I reported to headquarters," he said briefly, "and received orders to stop my motors and wait for dawn. It is believed that the darkness will be lifted when the Storm is started up again."

Hines did not hear him. He was listening with his ears strained to their utmost. In the near-silence that came with the engine's stopping, the sound of rain and thunder outside seemed to redouble. The rain was invisible, the lightning unseen, but there was a tumult within the tank that was terrifying. Yet in the midst of that tumult Hines thought he heard a faint cry.

It was repeated. Again, and again. And cold sweat came upon Hines. He could not believe his ears, yet he dared not disbelieve them. Out there in a storm such as would have been called a tornado if the Storm itself had not given a new meaning to the word, he heard a voice which he could swear was that of Kathryn!

The storm itself was violent enough to make venturing into the madness — and he would have to go into it, as a blind man.

The cry came once more. It was fainter, this time.

5

Two members of the crew of the tank volunteered to go with him. They went out as Alpine climbers travel, tied together with a long strand of wire that paid out behind them. It would insure that they returned to the tank, or would lead them to any of their number who was injured.

Hines went first, groping over unfamiliar ground, unable to guess where his next step would bring him. He had broken out the glass of a pocket compass proffered by one of the tank's company and steered by the feel of its needle, with the tank hooting dismally behind him at regular intervals for his better orientation.

He went on into the blackness which seemed almost familiar.

His flashlight bulb glowed dimly when three inches from his eyes. Farther away, its light was absorbed by the opaque air, and he seemed to swim through it as a diver might swim through a sea of ink.

A fall into a ditch crammed with debris corrected the sensation of swimming, however, and he blundered on and gashed his leg against the splintered stump of a tree whose knife-edged fragments were nowise softened by the rain.

Rain pelted downward through the darkness. It poured from him in streams. He had to bend almost double to protect his open compass from the falling water while he felt of the needle.

The tank hooted behind him. He went on. The wire attached to his waist dragged. It jerked, and he halted to allow the following man to move forward and give him slack. He shouted, and the beginning of his shout was loud, and the end of it was drowned out by thunder. He listened, and heard only the terrible drumming of miles of rain.

Then a cry in answer. He shouted again, and plunged forward and stumbled ten feet on and gashed his forehead horribly, and went on again with warm blood mingling with the rain that beat down on his face. Suddenly he was sprawling on hands and knees on a monstrous heap of broken bricks and field-stone.

A cry came up almost below him. He cursed the darkness then, and called once more; and Kathryn sobbed.

"I -- I'm all right, only some brick-work fell on me and I can't get up," she said unsteadily a moment later.

"I'm coming down to you," said Hines hoarsely.

"Be careful! There's an open space just above me, where the floor broke in, but there's loose rock there. You may fall."

Hines gritted his teeth and fumbled here and there with infinite caution. Loose rock above a hole over Kathryn's head meant not so much danger to him as to her.

He tore his hands on splintered planks. A figure came blundering near by. He heard it gasping, but he saw nothing, anywhere.

"Easy!" snapped Hines. "We're here! Stand still!"



Kathryn said steadily from below: "You're nearly above me. I think you're at the edge of the hole in the flooring."

He found it, and called quietly to the other man. "Our belts," he said briefly. "We'll put 'em together and you lower me. Then you can haul her up, and after her, me."

He went down, dangling in the blackness with no more knowledge of his whereabouts than a blind man would have had. He landed in a foot and a half of water.

"Here," said Kathryn unsteadily. "B-but be careful of the masonry."

He stumbled against her shoulder before he realized that she was trapped near the floor. The cellar was filling with the drainage of the rain. Hines was two men then, for an instant. One felt coolly until he had located the mass of brick and mortar that pinned her down, and had envisioned its position and its size. The other man was sick with horror at the thought of the death that had awaited her as the cellar slowly filled with water.

He had more than two men's strength as he wrenched at the mass of stone, though. It fell with a turgid splashing that was louder than the drumming of the rain and the constant splashing of water that came down into the stone-lined depression.

He lifted her and held her close, there in the unbelievable blackness. He sent her up, by the linked belts. And he carried her himself, the long, stumbling, rather terrible way back to the hooting tank, which slowly hauled in the wire as he advanced. The other men blundered on ahead of him to take any falls there might be while he carried Kathryn.

Her arm was broken, and she was badly bruised, but that was all. Hines set the arm himself, while she smiled at him gamely in the smelly, machinery-crowded war-engine.

Then Hines turned to the commander of the tank with a new and more savage grimness. He had gained a new motive from Kathryn's injury. Oddly enough, he had felt defeated in advance while he believed her dead, but a new and throbbing rage swept over him because of her injury, a fiercer passion than the hopeless hatred her death would have caused.

"Look here," he said savagely. "You've had orders to take directions from me. Preston's turned on the dark, outside. He thinks we're helpless. You radio headquarters and tell them I order you to go on. I take all responsibility."

The officer grinned.

The ordnance department maps of the Catskills leave some things to be desired, to be sure. There are errors, in spots, and they are not wholly up to date. But every road and bridlepath and every grade and hollow is shown upon them.

With a concrete road under their treads and the North Weddensdale corporate limits sign for a position-sign, the tanks could nearly go to any spot in all the mountains, blinded though they were.

Men had walked about each of the tanks, with flashlights held close to their eyes. They discovered that for a short distance beyond the tank, in the direction away from the sending-station of the waves of darkness, there was a lee, a "shadow" — a relatively small and cone-shaped shielded area, in which the air was protected from the Hertzian waves that made it opaque to light. In those shielded areas lights could be seen. And those small spaces of transparent air gave a bearing — rough, to be sure, but still a bearing — on the station that was sending the short waves.

The darkness was being transmitted from a spot nearly north-northeast of the steel monsters. A man swung up in top of each one with a flashlight and a hammer. He worked himself around the central turret until he had the turret between himself and Preston's transmitter of darkness. His flashlight gave him proof of his direction. He rapped on the turret-plates. One rap for each division of the compass to the east of north, and two for each division to the left, was the agreed signal. He would transmit the bearing of the source of darkness whenever the turret was pounded on from within.

"One more thing," said Hines crisply. "Arrange with other tanks to navigate by whistle-signals instead of radio. Preston will be listening in, you can be sure."

Then through the sound of thunder and of rain, there came the

multitudinous hoots of many whistles. There was a whirring and the roaring of engines. Then with a monstrous grinding, the tank set off.

Hines and the tank officer bent over the map of this locality. Kathryn looked on, though her eyes rested most often upon the haggard, dragged figure that was Hines.

"The road curves here," said Hines quietly. "That will place us definitely."

The officer laid his finger on a certain spot. "A bridge," he observed, "All of sixty feet high in the middle. We'll be crossing it — blind. And it may be blown out."

Hines shrugged. The tank rumbled on, and on... Its whistle hooted, and was answered from behind. Then a long line of blind monsters hooted one after the other as they swam through obscurity as black as the blackest ink.

Concrete under the treads. They were steering the monster by compass, now, and the sound of the treads.

Quite suddenly, the tank wallowed off the concrete. It lurched, careened, swung about and then found the way again.

"That's the curve," said the officer. "We're located all right."

From this time on the navigation of the monster vehicle was confident and crisp. A modern tank records its course and distance so accurately that even in the densest fog it can retrace its way for miles without a landmark.

From the map a forecast of the course to be followed was being made and the tank lumbered on through oblivion. Utter darkness filled the world without its steel walls, save where one man sat in a terrific downpour in a triangular small space of transparent air, and watched a dripping compass by the light of a flashlight.

From time to time he pounded savagely on the steel deck with a hammer, signaling to those within. From time to time, too, there were vast hooting noises, feet only from his head, and there were other dismal hootings behind him in the utter blackness.

The feel of the concrete underneath changed subtly. The forty-ton weight of the tank was making the huge bridge sway slightly.

The tank's whistle howled, in a succession of long and short blasts.

"They'll wait until we're across the bridge," said the officer shortly. "One at a time is load enough."

The leading tank ground on. The bridge quivered and shook. Presently the earth was solid under it again. It halted and seemed to bellow into the surrounding bedlam of rain and wind and thunder. An answering hoot came faintly. There was stillness, and presently the earth-quivering that told of the near approach of another monster. More hootings of whistles. Another great tank, and another.

The fifth tank was on its way across the narrow causeway which the map said spanned a ravine some sixty feet above the mountain stream. Suddenly, there was a wild screaming of its whistle, a terrific crash, and then a deafening detonation. The waiting tanks trembled from the concussion that ensued.

"It fell off the bridge," said the officer of the tank in which Hines rode. He spoke very calmly. "I suppose the rest of us weakened the bridge in passing over it. Maybe the Storm helped, too. It gave way and the bombs went off when the tank crashed."

He looked at Hines.

"We'll go on with those that are here with us," said Hines grimly. "Signal the rest to hunt for shelter from tomorrow's wind."

The hooting, dismal cavalcade of four tanks began again to fumble its way along the narrow ribbon of concrete that wound among the mountains. Twice the treads crunched shrieking metal beneath them. Cars, wrecked and, it was to be hoped, abandoned. Half a dozen times, in one relatively sheltered valley, the leading tank crushed a way through splintered masses of limbs and foliage that were heaped up in monster windrifts.

The half-drowned men out in the flood of rain pounded regularly their signals of the source of the waves of darkness. The tanks had gone five miles in all in a little over an hour, when the pounding on the outside became frantic. A new signal of direction came through. Hines said shortly: "Stop the whole line. Check with all of them."

The tanks had been boring their way through the blackness by map. The darkness-producing ether waves demonstrably had been coming from the north-northeast. Now, abruptly, they were proved to be coming from a little south of west.

Hines studied the map and the line that had been drawn to indicate the tank's ultimate destination. The sending-station was no longer there. It had changed position.

"Either," said Hines harshly, "Preston's moved his sending apparatus, or he has two or more of them. He turns one off and another one on. We haven't a burglar's chance of locating them if they turn off as we draw near them."

They were playing a deadly game of blind-man's-buff with Preston. Now Preston showed an unexpected resource. He had more than one outfit for producing darkness. When the tanks drew near one, that ceased to operate and another took up its task.

It seemed as if Preston had Hines beaten.

## 6

HEAVILY, LABORIOUSLY, CLUMSILY, the tanks crawled on through the darkness. They were blind and they were fumbling. They went clanking through a blackness as of the Abyss, with the peculiar confidence of things that have long been sightless, while rain beat upon them and thunder roared about them.

Hines and the tank officer were again bent over the map.

"Schaaf's experiment station was here," said Hines shortly, touching a spot on the engraved sheet. "It was more or less a secret, but he was trying to work out how to make these same darkness-producing waves. He was trying, in fact, to duplicate Preston's results in hopes of finding some way to neutralize them. That accounts for his short-wave set and the experimental license that enables him to use it."

The tank officer received a crossbearing from the tanks they had left behind at the wrecked bridge, and drew a line on his map.

"This is the third darkness-transmitter Preston's brought into use," he said quietly.

"And he's using underground aerals," said Hines shortly, "because anything above ground would have been blown away by the Storm. We can't locate the transmitters closer than within a quarter of a mile, by cross-bearings, and we can't count on destroying them even with explosives unless we locate them more closely in the wind that will be blowing by dawn."

"We're licked, then," said the tank officer.

"Not yet," said Hines grimly. "We've got the bearings now. Let's go on. I've still got one hope. Schaaf's a smart man."

The tanks crawled on blindly, like gigantic eyeless slugs creeping along the bottom of the ocean's deepest deep, while within a vast irregular circle fifty miles across, the drenched, shivering, hysterical survivors of the Storm itself went closer to madness from the terror of the dark.

At one o'clock in the morning, while all over the United States people sat up by their radios and listened fascinatedly to the never-ceasing broadcasts of news and orders, reports and fragmentary pleas for help, there was the first direct word from the man who had caused the Storm That Had to be Stopped.

Radio broadcasting was, of course, the next most important factor, after Hines's activities in lessening the damage Preston did to the earth.<sup>1</sup>

All the first night of the storm a warning was broadcast to the isolated folk who hastily turned to the radio as their sole link with the outside, that the wind was to be expected to begin again at daybreak. By broadcasting the location of the few hamlets protected by fortuitously placed mountains, much good was done.

Mostly, though, the radio served to make all the world realize the extent of the catastrophe. It is to the credit of the people of America that trains loaded down with supplies for the devastated area were already on their way while the Storm still raged on its second day.

The radio enabled all the continent to share in the horror of the Storm, and also the radio was the means of communication with

Hines and the blinded tanks in the storm-center, so that a hundred million people shared in his adventure, in his attempt to stop the Storm.

Perhaps the most spectacular feat the radio performed that night was an accident. It was at one o'clock. The tank officer in charge of Hines's tank was communicating with headquarters. The Red Cross had arranged for half a dozen sentences from him, describing the devastation the tank had passed through on its way to the mountains. If rehabilitation was to take place, vast sums would be needed, and money could best be got while the catastrophe was fresh in peoples' minds.

The tank officer spoke curtly into the microphone to headquarters. His words were amplified and rebroadcast and sent over the nation-wide chains of radio stations. A hundred million people heard his voice and even the noise of the machinery of the tank, crawling through the darkness where the Storm was made.

But he had spoken no more than a dozen words when another voice cut in. This other voice was harsh, metallic; an abominably cocksure and arbitrary voice. It spoke with a studied insolence.

"This is Preston speaking," said the voice arrogantly, and instantly folk all over the United States stiffened in their chairs as the unexpected tones came from their loudspeakers.

"I have been much amused by the accounts of the efforts made to find and kill me. I have been listening in, of course, from my entirely secure retreat in the storm-center, and I am speaking on the same wave-length the tanks have been using. I hear my own voice in another speaker, being rebroadcast as the lieutenant's voice was supposed to be. I think it about time that the people of the United States should know with whom and what they deal."

Preston's voice stopped, and millions of people waited breathlessly. Static interrupted his words, and whole phrases were sometimes obliterated by the crashings made by the lightning, but on the whole his message was clear.

"I have made this storm for my own private purposes. I can continue it for days, for weeks, even for months. In one week, I am informed, I will have so deranged the normal atmospheric

conditions in the United States that the crops of this fall will be practically ruined.

"In two weeks, by drawing down the colder air from the Arctic Circle, I will have brought on winter in Canada. In three weeks there will be four feet of snow in London, Germany will be frozen in, and all the north of France will have semi-arctic climate, while the United States will face a famine. I invite the meteorological experts of the world to verify my statement.

"I shall continue the storm I have created until the governments I have mentioned make it worth my while to stop it. In the meantime, I assure you that the tanks that are trying to locate me have no chance of success. The Storm will continue until I wish it to stop. I will stop it only when I am sufficiently paid for my trouble."

The arrogant voice ceased. Announcer's voices, quivering with excitement, followed with a statement that radio compasses had picked up the message before its cessation and that it had actually come from the Catskills, from the storm-center.

The United States began to be afraid. The Boards of Governors of the Stock Exchanges of New York and Chicago began to arrange, quietly, for the closing of those exchanges. Cables began to carry long messages in diplomatic code across the ocean-beds.

Suddenly another broadcast, as widely distributed as the first, came from Schaaf, in his tiny laboratory set in a hillside. He had a national reputation, now, as an associate of Hines, and he was frantically called upon for a statement to nullify the panic that Preston's announcement would cause.

Schaaf's speech, repeated in the same ten million receiving sets, was entirely characteristic of him.

"I haff heard Breston's speech," he said dryly. "I remark that my friendt Hines is on the way to join me in a little *Schrecklichkeit* party, to be bractised on Breston. I consider that as imborant as anything Breston has said. We will haff him in a matter of hours. As for his threats to mess up der weather of two continents, I say one thing: No matter how thin you slice it, it is still boloney."



Schaaf's speech had just the tone necessary to restore confidence without lessening the public's sense of the real urgency of the situation. There were speculators in food-stuffs and other necessities, of course, who immediately grasped the opportunity Preston's threats created. They, by the way, suffered considerable losses by their enterprise as things turned out.

But on the whole the public reacted in highly favorable fashion to Schaaf's dry reassurance. Americans will always pay more for a good joke than a pathetic story, and Schaaf raised more money by the last line of his speech than all the tear-jerking efforts of radio spellbinders during the rest of the night.

Schaaf did not listen in and hear himself eulogized on the ether-waves, the details of his scientific career sandwiched in between casualty lists and weather predictions. He was placidly unaware of his sudden celebrity.

In fact, until the restored mail-services brought him sacks of admiring and begging letters, and an astounding number of proposals of marriage from female admirers, he was not aware that he had done anything out of the ordinary.

He was busy. He turned from the microphone with a grunt of disgusted relief. His experiment-station was a tiny stone-walled building half sunk in a mountainside. It consisted of four rooms.

The laboratory alone was of use to him now. Experimenting as he had been with short radio waves, he had needed a workshop in which the only etheric disturbances would be those he had made himself. The walls of the workshop were lined with copper sheeting and the windows covered with heavy copper gauze, all of which was grounded. The interior was insulated from all Hertzian waves from without.

Now that laboratory glowed brightly with electric light, though he had only to open a door to see the apparently solid mass of no longer transparent air which resulted from Preston's devices.

He took down a screen from a window. Instantly the blackness seemed to pour, to stab, into the brightly lighted laboratory. Through the opening in the grounded shielding, Preston's short-waves penetrated, depriving the air of its ability to permit light to

pass through it. A long cone of darkness, so definite as to seem a solid substance, projected into the room — more powerful than the shielding because of the nearness to Preston's headquarters.

Schaaf grumbled and measured it, carefully making his measurements from accurately marked points. He wrote down his figures and replaced the screen. The seemingly tangible cone vanished with much the effect of magic.

Schaaf sat down at a little table and began to calculate absorbedly. He scowled as he worked, and mumbled irritably as he took down a book of logarithms and ran his fingers down its columns.

The table trembled, from time to time, with the violence of the thunder without. There was a very slow leak in the roof over in one corner, and now and again a drop fell glittering to an enlarging puddle on the floor. The wind howled outside. The rain drummed on the roof.

Schaaf finished his calculations, leaned back and absently combed out his luxuriant yellow whiskers with his fingers, then filled and lighted his pipe. Its poisonously strong odor filled the air.

The thunder was deafening and nearly continuous. The shrieking of the winds was daunting. The drumming sound of the rain was unspeakably depressing. Schaaf smoked comfortably for a space, and picked up the remnant of a half-eaten sandwich. He bit into it, stopped, and listened keenly.

There was a thin and dismal hooting above even the tumult from the skies. Schaaf beamed, and then growled impatiently. He swathed himself in oilskins, muttering something about "*Der verdammt Breston!*" and took a huge reel of cord from the wall. It looked like the extra-strong braided cord that is used for scientific kite-flying — or for getting a kite aloft that is to carry up a temporary aerial. He fastened the end inside the door, knotting and double-knotting it. He went out, unreeling the cord behind him, and fought the door shut again.

There was no longer any movement or any activity in the laboratory. A loudspeaker made nasal noises in one corner, which the

booming of thunder and of wind and rain drowned out to inarticulateness. The lights burned steadily.

An open fire alternately leaped madly upward and died down to nothing beneath an improvised damper closing off most of the chimney-space above it. Rain made rattling noises on the windows, and wind screamed overhead, and always, always, always, the thunder boomed and crashed.

Then the door burst open and Schaaf came in again, fumbling his way back along the cord. He was soaked. Behind him, guiding themselves by the cord, came three other people. Hines was one of them, tattered and ragged and with a great gash on his forehead. He carried Kathryn lightly, in spite of the storm. She was wrapped in an oilskin, one arm in improvised splints.

Hines set her down carefully and blinked with the air of a man whose sight has suddenly been restored. The third person was the officer in command of the leading tank.

Schaaf put his whole weight against the door and closed it. "It was not bad work," he observed comfortably. "You stopped on der concrete road where der big tree had blown down, as I told you by radio. I came down, blundered into you, and banged on der door. Here we are. Now, where is der map?"

The tank-officer produced a sheet he had carried under his slicker. Schaaf began to unroll it. "I haff sworn — *Gott!* How I haff sworn! — because I didn't haff a map of der locality. Miss Bush, go ofer by der fire and get warm. Now, Hines, show me my bresent location and tell me der scale of der map."

The tank-officer, instead, obeyed both orders. Hines was settling Kathryn comfortably by the fire. And Schaaf took dividers and a pencil and calculated feverishly, grumbling in guttural German at the absurdity of calculating distances in feet and inches instead of meters. Eventually he measured with painstaking accuracy, drew six lines from the location of his laboratory to very precise and exact lengths, and put large dots at their ends.

"There," he said decisively. "That is der best I can do. I have watched der *verdammt* darkness. Look!" He pulled out a window-screen and a black cone of opacity stabbed across the bright-

ly lighted room. He replaced the screen and it vanished. "Der wafes that destroy der transparency of der air," he said briskly, "can come in der window-opening when I remofe part of der copper insulation inside. They interfere with each other, dissipate, and generally lose der original effectifness. Which gifes me my information. By der shape of der cone of blackness, I haff calculated der direction and distance of six different points from which Breston has transmitted darkness. At these six spots he has sending-stations."

The tank-officer said warmly: "Splendid, sir! We took bearings as we came along — see my pencil-lines, sir? — and they intersect your lines at just the spots you indicate! It looks as if you are correct."

"Of course I'm correct! And if I had had der intelligence of an angleworm I would haff made der same measurements of der wafes that made the storm and we would know where Breston is. He is not at all of those places, certainly."

"No," said Hines. "But what I'm hoping for, Schaaf, is some way to see in spite of the darkness. Once—"

"*Gott in Himmel!*" cried Schaaf angrily. "Haff I not kicked myself forty-sefen times? Before, when we fought Breston in New York, his wafes made der air opaque to fisible light, but not to ultra-fiolet, and we did tricks with that to find our way about. But now, he has juggled his wafe-lengths to make der air absorb der ultra-fiolet rays also. I am as blind as a bat at der bottom of der sea, Hines, and I am mad! I am mad as der deffil, Hines!"

Hines frowned at the map. "He'll keep the darkness on, even after daybreak," he said coldly. "He'll shoot the storm-producing waves out as an addition. And since he turns off his sending-stations when a tank draws near—"

"Maybe he has microphones in der ground," said Schaaf gloomily. "Der sound of a tank is unmistakable. Or maybe he switches them on and off for der mere purpose of being confusing. In any event I haff done all I can. I tell you abbroximately where his sending stations are. But you cannot find them without seeing them or tracing der wafes home, and he turns them off when a

tank comes near. It is like trying to catch a mouse that is in six holes at once."

Hines smiled faintly. "But we have lots of cats," he observed. "Lieutenant, I want these orders given."

Schaaf listened critically, then appreciatively, and then he beamed as Hines's voice went on. "Hines," he said comfortably, "if your brains were dynamite and they went off, der report would be like Vesuvius. We got der son-of-a-gun!"

Even the tank officer grinned confidently as he prepared to make his way back to the tank by the guiding cord.

## 7

**RAIN DRUMMED ON THE ROOF** and clattered on the windows. Wind shrieked outside the little stone building. A mountain-flank had protected it from the blast of air that had blown all the day before, and the storm that raged during the night was merely a gale such as uproots trees and sinks ships at sea. But it was uncomfortable to listen to, with thunder making the tumult of a bombardment.

The smoke of Schaaf's pipe floated about the room. The loud-speaker had been turned off. Hines turned it on with an air of impatience.

"The lieutenant's been gone a long time. Do you suppose he was blown away?"

"Of course not, Hines. He is a smart young man. He got to his tank, and he has been gifting orders by radio to der other tanks that were left behind when der bridge gafe way. Breton will see that there is a cat at efery mouse-hole, in a little while."

"Preston probably has more than the six you marked down," said Hines shortly, "but we have eleven tanks."

He was worried, though. Abominably worried. All but four of the tank-force had been left behind early in the night, when one tank was destroyed as a bridge gave way under it. Those land-warships had now been ordered, separately, to make wide detours and somehow get to the six spots Schaaf had indicated.

They would approach the stations from which Preston was transmitting his darkness-waves. If the station did not cease to transmit, the tank could ride it down and crush it, or bomb it with heavy bombs and destroy it utterly.

Preston had undoubtedly planned to alternate in the use of his transmitters for the precise purpose of preventing their location. But if every station he had ready to transmit had a tank waiting to pounce upon it — It was exactly like the posting of a cat at every mouse-hole. If the mouse showed his head — if a known station emitted the waves that produced the opacity of the air — the tank would pounce. But Hines was worried. Preston was clever.

"I am thinking, Hines," said Schaaf placidly, "that it should be near sunrise. I go and look."

For the third time he unfastened and opened a screen. For the third time a seemingly solid mass of blackness stabbed into the room. Schaaf disappeared into the tangible darkness. The noises of the outer air were suddenly magnified as he opened a window.

And the outer noises were changing markedly. Rain still fell and thunder still boomed. But the rain diminished. The drops became fewer and less regular. Then the thunder dwindled.

The listeners in the laboratory realized that a steady, even wind was blowing. It was a strong wind when they first noticed it. It gave forth a low hum whose pitch rose in minutes. It became a scream, and then a whistle that grew more and more shrill until human ears could not detect it. And then a steady, regular roaring noise took its place. It was the wind of the Storm That Had to be Stopped. On the second day of the Storm it rose much more rapidly than on the first.

Hines and Kathryn looked at each other. Kathryn was pale, but she smiled at Hines.

"We got to get out to the tank!" he said harshly.

Schaaf popped magically out of the blackness. "Of all der double-barreled imbeciles!" he said bitterly. "We haff to reach der tank, and it is impossible! Der wind already is as strong as it was at its worst yesterday. Nobody could liff in it a second! Der labo-

ratory nearly went yesterday! It will not stand another half hour if der wind increases!

The wind did increase. Shielded though the laboratory was by a mountain-flank, and thick stone as its walls were, the beams that upheld the roof began to creak. The walls quivered. Plaster fell from the ceiling. Windows burst outward, suddenly, and all light and movable things leaped toward them and vanished. Hines seized Kathryn and bore her to the mountainward side of the laboratory.

"We haff," said Schaaf calmly, "maybe fife minutes. Maybe less. I am sorry as der deffil, Hines, that we did not get that *verdammt* Breston."

Then there was a vibration which seemed to shake the very flooring. And suddenly a wall reeled and caved in, and a section of roof tore out. Then, quite incredibly, the monstrous beak of a tank thrust its way delicately into the laboratory and stopped. A door slid aside and the tank-officer stood beckoning in the opening.

"I figured it was the only thing to do," he shouted above the wind-roar as they struggled inside the tank. "The wind's unbelievable outside, and if you were kept from blowing away, you'd strangle."

"As der poet says," observed Schaaf calmly, "you said a library-full. What do we do now?"

"I've been getting reports from the other tanks," said the officer cheerfully. "Three of them have reached position. They know they're within a quarter of a mile of a darkness-transmitter, but each time it has turned off. The others are going on. We'll carry out the rest of the plan. All ready?"

The tank lurched backward. The laboratory collapsed, and instantly there was a savage bombardment by the wind. Beams, sections of roofs, stones, articles of furniture — everything the wind could wrench from the shattered building it flung with maniacal fury upon the tank.

The metal monster shuddered and changed and reeled, and then turned about and slid on downhill with a ponderous clanking of its

mighty treads. But the noise of the wind sounded even above the internal roaring of the tank's machinery.

There were hootings, unbelievably faint, and the tank-officer shook his head. He spoke curtly into a speaking-tube, and turned apologetically to Hines. "Sound-signals are useless, sir. We are having to use radio again. We'll have quite a time of it anyhow. Better find seats of some sort. Or you can come up in the control-room."

The control-room was a tiny cubbyhole. There was room for the man who steered the cumbersome war-engine, and normally there was bare space for the commander of the tank. Now Hines squeezed in between them for the second time, and there was only the light of the dimly-lit instrument-board and a curious fuzzy appearance about the vision-slits where the darkness came a little way into the tank's metal interior.

"Six of the tanks are going to their posts. The other four are following us," said the officer in Hines's ear. "We're going to try to keep hundred-yard intervals, but we're all blind."

And the tank went crawling on.

The instruments gave their varying indications. The wind roared without. In the dead blackness the air had assumed not only the appearance but the solidity of a substance. It pressed upon the forty-ton tank with such a force that even the monstrous engine was edged steadily to one side.

The line of tanks, crawling through blackness, was following a concrete road by map and the feel of the reads.

There was no one in the tanks who did not think in shuddering horror of what the blinded monsters might be doing as they lurched and swayed across a place that had been inhabited. There might be people yet living who would be crushed beneath the tanks' broad treads.

But they went on. Their destination was a spot which Hines had chosen. The located transmitters of darkness formed an irregular circle, and Hines guessed that the form was not an accident. And if it were intentional, and the transmitters were governed by remote control, then sheer efficiency would dictate that the control-



ling spot should be in the center of the circle. If anywhere, Preston would be at a spot nearly equidistant from all his transmitters.

Hines watched the vision-slits of the control-room. They were narrow slits in a bullet-proof steel wall. Wind came in them so fiercely that it stung exploring fingers. And the darkness crept in. The walls near the vision-slits looked fuzzy on the side nearest the darkness-transmitter then in action. A man outside could have taken the station-bearing accurately, while this method was rough at best; and no man could live outside now.

Hines craned his neck suddenly to look behind. The blurry little bands of darkness had vanished before him. Now they reappeared at the back of the control-room.

Hines clutched at the tank-officer's arm. "A transmitter, behind us!" he barked in the officer's ear. "Have that last tank turn back and try to smash it!"

A snapped order went down the speaking tube. The trailing tank turned about. Its steersman had but little to do save keep a certain disgusting fuzzy appearance at vision-slits exactly before him. The tank went blundering into heaps of still-standing masonry where the town had been. It surmounted or destroyed them. It careened and teetered upon the edge of a cellar, plunged boldly into it, crashed blindly to the other side and reared upward clumsily to crawl out.

The officer in command of the trailing tank saw that the fuzziness had vanished from the control-slits ahead. It had reappeared behind. As near as this, even the roughest of observations would serve. He yelled an order down below. A monstrous, misshapen egg went rolling down from the back of the tank. The monster went blundering on.

Thirty seconds, forty. There was a concussion which drowned out even the roar of the storm. Vast fragments of masonry struck the tank.

Suddenly there was a light outside the vision-slits. There had been a transmitter of darkness in the destroyed town. Deep in a sub-cellar, evidently, and sending out darkness from a buried aerial. Two hundred pounds of TNT had gone off above it. The trans-

mitter might be destroyed, or it might be merely jammed. But for a space, there was light.

Those in the tank could see that there was a valley all about, and hillsides rearing up on either hand. Except for the inevitable motion of objects past the tank, and four slug-like monsters crawling up a ribbon of concrete road, the tank-officer's main impression was that of utter deadness and lack of motion.

Wind blew upon his own machine with an unbearable, terrible force, but there was no sign of movement outside. There was no dust, no flying debris; there were no clouds. The wind blew with an awful force which had already demolished all things that could be destroyed, and now it kept up a horrible steady pressure that held all things immovable.

The sun shone down from a brazen sky, giving forth no heat, and wind blew and blew and blew.

Utter blackness fell again. Another transmitter of darkness had taken up the work of the one destroyed. And the wandering tank swung about and went crawling after the others on the now-blotted out concrete road.

8

HINES GRINNED SAVAGELY, up in the control-room. "We got one of them!" he said grimly. "We got it by accident, maybe, but we got one of them!"

The speaking-tube whistled. The tank officer answered, then turned to Hines. "Tank Number Four thinks it has located another station. It is going ahead. The moment of light helped."

Grinding, pounding, roaring progress, with the wind a terrific pressure all about. One minute passed, two, three...

Light again. The leading tank was at the crest of the hill-road. Desolation was all about. Far away — miles and miles away, it seemed — there was a smother of white which would be a lake, with a dark spot upon it which would be a rocky islet.

Again the speaking-tube whistled. "Number Four reports it set off two bombs. Light came on after the second."

Hines's jaws were clamped tightly. "Every one destroyed," he said coolly, "helps to get the others. That's two of them, and we've got cats at the mouse-holes now!"

Again utter blackness. Mountains, the long straight stretch of white road descending, the frothing lake and the island at the end of the valley, all were blotted out. There was only the clanking of machinery and the bestial roar of the wind that thrust with a terrible force at the tanks.

Down the long road which no man could see. Despite the wall of wind without, the green mountainsides had seemed strangely inviting. And the sunlight had seemed brighter than ever the sun had seemed before. The deadly blackness was the more intolerable because weary eyes had looked upon the light again.

The machinery clanked and rumbled.

"Number Three tank reports — Number Seven also, that they have located transmitting stations—"

"One of them is wrong, maybe," said Hines coolly, "but let them both try."

The man at the steering-bar said quietly: "We're nearly out of gas, Lieutenant. I just noticed it. Enough for two more miles, maybe."

The speaking-tube again. "Number Three tank reports it exploded two bombs. Its station ceased to transmit, but the darkness still holds. Number Seven is letting go now... Number Two has located a station... Seven reports its station has ceased to transmit darkness, Number Two is bombing now...Five has found its station."

"That completes the list," said Hines steadily, "if none of them made a mistake."

Again the voice from below. "Two has put its station out of action...Five fell into some sort of excavation. Can't get out at the moment. Asks for orders."

"If the ship can stand hand-grenades," said Hines savagely, "have them tossed out of all ports and see what happens."

Darkness. The pressure of the wind and its terrible steady roar. The noise of the machinery of the tank—

Light!

Again sunlight. Again the mountains. Again the smother of white which was the lake ahead. The leading tanks advanced heavily until the concrete road divided into two, and one went along each shoreline. This lake had been a summer resort once, but now the trees were splintered and blown away. The houses were utterly destroyed. There was only the uncannily blue sky and the still-green grass carpet of the shores, and a rocky small island half-smothered in foam.

The tank came to a cumbersome halt. Schaaf popped his whiskers through the companionway that led up to the control-room. "Ha!" he said exuberantly. "We haff der son-of-a-gun! Hines, I haff to take some observations! I think and I suspect, but I haff to be sure where der last of der excitement takes place."

Hines stared about, and then pointed. A stony cliff reared upward some hundreds of yards to the right. It was forty or fifty feet high, and a heap of debris beneath it was proof that it created a lee. He indicated it in silence. The tank crawled heavily, smashing a way into the heaped-up trash.

Its engines coughed and stopped. "Out of gas, sir," reported someone from below.

"It is no matter," said Schaaf blandly. "I haff a hunch. Der island ofer yonder is a charming place. One could establish a residence there and put in a power-house."

"Get a range-finder reading on it," said Hines curtly. "Have all the tanks range it."

Schaaf was cautiously opening the tank-door. He put one hand cautiously outside. "Tie a rope around me," he said comfortably, "and I take a chance. There is a wind, but no such a hell of a wind. Der bank makes a lee."

He stepped outside with an electriclight extension and a square sheet of iron. It seemed peculiar, even futile, to be carrying an electric bulb in the overpowerily bright sunshine. Schaaf balanced himself precariously.

Radiant heat could not be felt from the electric bulb; only in-contact with the glass could its heat be detected. It was an exact

parallel with the lightwaves that Preston could neutralize, but with a metal plate between the bulb and the source of the neutralizing short waves.

A gun went off not ten feet above his head. Shaaf swore and sat down violently. His necktie flopped about his face blinding him for an instant. Then he heard the dull concussions of other guns. Every tank was firing madly with every gun it could bring to bear. And Schaaf swore bitterly as he saw what they were firing at.

There was a little rocky island out in the lake. The lake itself was a smother of white foam. But projecting upward above the water there was a mass of dark-brown rock some fifty or sixty feet high. There were traces of grass still upon it, but if there had been trees they were gone, and if there had been a summer residence that also had long since vanished in the Storm. But now, quite insolently, there was visible a signal of Preston's presence and of his defiance.

A globular mass of darkness had formed about the islet's peak. It looked as if Preston had turned on a transmitter of darkness and had deliberately begun to transmit the short waves with an absolute minimum of power. The fraction of a watt, perhaps, was being put into a hidden or a buried antenna. An irregular, amoeba-like globule of darkness hovered about the islet's tip.

Shells were bursting in and about it. A section of rock split outward from the island's side and fell into the foaming water. Instantly, it seemed, the globule of darkness expanded. From feet, its size could only be measured by hundreds of yards. The tanks were firing into a vast expanse of nothingness, and one by one they ceased to fire. There was nothing to aim at.

Then, very swiftly, the darkness increased in size. Preston was putting more power into his transmitter. And quite suddenly the world was dark again.

It had been a gesture of pure insolence. Tanks could not reach the island. He had seen the gray monsters gathered on the shore, and Preston had blanketed the world in darkness after showing the only men to reach his stronghold the utter futility of further effort to reach him.

He was protected by the deep waters of a mountain lake from attack by tanks, by hills and the Storm from all other means of attack, and by the unthinkable blackness of his own creation even from assault by projectiles.

Up in the control-room, the tank officer swore bitterly and turned to Hines. "I think we're done, sir," he said savagely. "We can't wade out through the lake to him, and of course the Storm—"

Hines's eyes were slits.

"Let's look at the map," he said shortly. "We might as well get the other tanks alongside us, by the way. In the lee of this cliff, we can go from one to the other."

He had taken figures from the map before Shaaf came back inside the tank, cursing mightily in German. Hines was asking curt questions and giving even curter orders, and when the other tanks came clanking into place men went out into the alleviated storm beneath the cliff and made demands of gasoline and wire cable and bombs.

Two tanks only had fuel for a run of another two miles. The rest supplied cable and bombs, and men gingerly unscrewed the fuses of the monster bombs and emptied four of the huge cases of all their contents. Then they labored terrifically to bind four still-loaded cases to the emptied ones, and fastened wire cable to the clumsy mass.

All this was done in darkness with the Storm roaring overhead, and while Schaaf was calculating feverishly at Hines's demand and the tank-officer was writing out his results in terms of formal orders, according to the customs and ordinances of the United States Army.

Then the ground quivered as two huge tanks moved away from their fellows. Now was the moment of greatest tension. The bombs had to be dragged over soft earth, and if they exploded with their loads of two hundred pounds each of T.N.T.—eight hundred pounds in the four loaded bombs—then the tank-force would be wiped out and Preston would win his single-handed war

against the world. But the fuses had been changed, and they had hopes.

There were still three people up in the control-room of the tank that had carried Hines. One was Hines, of course, and one was the tank-commander, and Kathryn was the third. Hines knew the chance he was taking. If the tanks were wiped out, he wanted to be near Kathryn when the end came. Schaaf was down by the wireless transmitter, biting at his nails and growling guttural profanity at the intervals between reports.

"Both tanks have reached their first position," came the report up the speaking-tube. "They're reeling in the cable."

Hines held Kathryn protectively close. But it was rather useless. They had combined four depth-bombs with four empty depth-bomb cases to make a monster floating bomb. They had fastened it in the center of a long, spliced-together steel cable, with a tank hauling at each end.

Those tanks were now posted where the shores of the lake began to curve together. They were reeling in their lines. When the lines tightened, the bomb would be dragged away from the now fuelless remnant of the tank-force and out into the water of the lake. With luck, the bombs would not go off. But if luck were bad, and a purposely insensitized fuse struck a rock or stone or bit of debris—

Long minutes went by. The speaking tube whistle was a blessed sound. "Reeling completed, sir. The cable is taut."

Two tanks now went crawling through the blankness down the opposite shores of the little lake. Between them stretched the cable with the monstrous floating bomb.

It is well known that fifty pounds of T.N.T. will shatter the walls of a submarine, and that a torpedo carries a hundred and fifty, and that the effect of an explosion varies as the square of the amount of explosive present. Eight hundred pounds of T.N.T. in one blast would sink any ship or shatter any rock.

But against the massive walls of even a small island?—well, it would produce a concussion. It might shake down fifty tons or a hundred tons of rock. It might do impressive local damage, to be

sure, but the damage would be strictly local. The rest of the island would feel nothing worse than a sharp concussion. And that was all Hines could hope for.

Schaaf had assigned arbitrary coordinates and positions for the tanks' reports. When their treads had covered so much ground in such-and-such directions, the cable should be out so much....

"Second position reached," said the speaking-tube briefly. "All figures are as anticipated."

Hines's hands clenched fiercely. The range-finders had given the distance of the island. The map had given the outline of the lake. Down the center of the turmoil of frothing water a bomb of colossal destructive power was moving with two straining tanks towing it from the shore, and all for an absurdly trivial physical effect which was all that could be looked for.

"Third position reached," said the speaking-tube. "All figures seem correct. The tanks await orders."

"Tell them to go ahead," said Hines. His voice was hoarse. On this everything depended.

There was no movement inside the tank. There was no sound except the deep, deep roaring of the Storm overhead. But then, quite suddenly, the tank quivered all over. It was as if the ground had slipped, had quivered suddenly; as if it had been struck an abrupt though far from dangerous blow. It was just enough to bring Hines's elbow sharply into contact with the steering-bar.

But suddenly the tank-commander was snapping orders. "Open fire! All guns!"

And the whole inside of the tank resounded with the sledge-hammer blows, the terrific impacts of guns firing at their highest rate.

For perhaps the last time, it seemed to Hines, the island was again in view. It was already the center of a storm of bursting shells. There was a colossal wave of water yet subsiding from beside it, and a huge column of rock was topping soundlessly and very deliberately into the lake, and every tank on the lake-shore was pouring shell after shell after shell upon the mass of stone that remained.



Hines had made his last gamble. The destruction of the other darkness-sending stations by concussions seemed to him to show one possible weakness in Preston's preparations.

It was not likely that in every case the dropped time-bombs that had put the other darkness-transmitters out of action, had made direct hits upon the apparatus. It seemed most probable that Preston, like all other experimenters with radio waves, had used vacuum tubes for his oscillators. And vacuum tubes were made of glass, and they are thin, therefore concussion will break them.

Hines had not expected the shock of the explosion against the island's rocky shore to destroy Preston's apparatus. Not at all. He had only hoped for a single sharp shock, a single smart snapping effect.

As a matter of fact, on the island itself there had been exactly the impression of a sudden and terrific earthshock. And it was sudden enough to make the glass vacuum tubes of the short-wave transmitter shiver to atoms in their sockets. The transmitter was quite unharmed, but it was thoroughly useless after that!

Watching, with the flashes of high-explosive shells breaking about every portion of the island, Hines saw a sudden thick cloud of smoke arise. It was too dense, too thick, to be dissipated even by the wind which still blew madly. And great cracks appeared in the rocks of the island, and steam poured forth.

Schaaf went out of the tank with his hands over his ears. He held up his face to the sun and abruptly began to dance with a wholly elephantine lack of grace. Because the sun's rays were warm!

Gradually, slowly, the tanks ceased firing. They exhausted their ammunition upon their target, and the surface of the island was a mass of splintered rock and steam poured in dense clouds from its interior.

Then it was possible to hear Schaaf bellowing. "Der storm-wafes are off! Der storm-wafes are off! We got der son-of-a-gun! We got him!"

And very abruptly, it seemed, clouds were forming overhead, and the wind of the Storm began to change from a monstrous

steady blast to something no worse than a mere tornado, and in an hour it was hardly more than a terrific gale.

Before nightfall thunder was rolling over a circle two thousands miles across, and rain was falling in torrents only preceded by the night before. Two weeks or more of chaotic weather conditions were being predicted by the weather bureaus, but after that the air conditions would again become normal.

Schaaf was the first man on the island and his gloomiest predictions were verified. Preston's apparatus had been destroyed by explosions from below. Not only had explosives been placed by Preston to ruin the apparatus and prevent it from being examined, but great masses of thermit had been placed here and there to complete the destruction. Apparently, Preston had intended to destroy his devices when their use was completed, and so had been prepared, by accident, for the disaster that came upon his plans. No notes, no diagrams, no single article of any value to Schaaf was ever found, on which account he swore bitterly. But a human skeleton was found charred and half-consumed in the ruins of the undergrown workshop. It was assumed to be Preston, but Schaaf regarded even this hopeful thought with disfavor.

He expressed his bitterness after a complete round of the six other transmitting-stations showed them all destroyed with thermit and explosive, apparently by some contrivance which would act automatically when they were no longer operable.

"Der verdammt scoundrel," he said bitterly to Hines. "He gifes me a pain in der duodenum. If I had der information he had, I would be der greatest benefactor of der world! I haff an idea, and if I can only find out how he did his tricks, I show you der Golden Age again! Ach, Gott! Why is it that fillains haff der best brains?"

He was smoking furiously in Hines's apartment when he made his plaint. The telephone rang. Hines spoke into it, smiling. When he had ended, Schaaf said suspiciously: "That was Miss Bush. She is clefer, Hines. But—is she too clefer?"

"Did you see how she wrote up the whole business for the *Star*?"

Schaaf nodded, and puffed at his pipe. "She made you a hero,

and me a hero, and she threw enough flowers at der tank-men to make der worldt see how brafе and courageous and altogether der cat's-whiskers you are, Hines. Yes. She is clefer. But as your friend I ask it; is she too clefer?"

Hines was standing up, now, and absently looking at his hat on a nearby chair. "Too clever?" he repeated abstractedly, but smiling nevertheless. "What is too clever?"

"A woman," said Schaaf shrewdly, "that makes eferbody see how clefer der man she lofes is, is clefer. But when she sees that she has brains also, and that when she marries she will haff to take der back seat, and she sees that she is a darned fool to do it—then she is too clefer."

"She's not," said Hines blithely. "She's going to marry me. In fact, we're going down town now to pick out some rings and such things." He added perfunctorily: "Want to come along?"

"Nix," said Schaaf cynically. "You don't want me now. But I come in, Hines, ach, I come in when it is time to buy der teething-rings and der baby-mugs. Then I won't be in der way!"



# The Cauldron



## *"Fire burn and cauldron bubble"*

Richard A. Lupoff writes, in relation to a comment on his article, *The Case of the Doctor Who Had No Business* (SMS #14, Winter 1969): "Dennis Lien certainly puts his finger on one of the major problems in constructing a Tarzan chronology when he makes note of the 'quick maturity' phenomenon. If Tarzan was born in 1889 or thereabouts, it is very difficult to imagine his having a son of mature or even adolescent age by the time of the first World War.

"I can't reconcile the dates. Burroughsians over the years have devised a number of ingenious explanations rather than sim-

ply face up to the fact that Burroughs goofed in constructing those early stories, but I won't go into those explanations here.

"Frankly, I find myself having to give up most such 'scholarly' literary pursuits as my own writing shifts from a spare-time to a full-time basis. The number of hours of searching out sources, reading, note-making, correlation of data, etc., required to produce a book like mine on Burroughs is simply too great in relation to the monetary return from such a book. Producing fiction of one's own is far more lucrative — and please don't condemn me for crass

commercialism or greed. It isn't that at all, but the brutal reality of having to put food on the table and a roof over my family's heads that dictates my decision.

"Still, I hope to be able to turn out an occasional piece of 'literary appreciation' from time to time, like the one I did for you a while back on John Kendrick Bangs, and the one I hope to do for you some time soon on Edwin Lester Arnold. But there won't be many such, and probably none of book length — I can't afford them.

"I must say that I enjoyed the Lunacon panel upon which you appeared with Ted White, Terry Carr, and Don Bensen. It was a more intelligent and interest discussion than many such, but I found it both distressing and depressing to hear Ted and you agreeing on the dismal state of the magazine business — at least the magazine business in 'our' field of science fiction, fantasy, and allied genres."

Time was when the small circulation magazine ("small" as compared to *TIME*, *LIFE*, *FORTUNE*, *T.V. GUIDE*, etc.) could get along and hope to grow year by year, but today most of the opportunities for starting small and growing big are choked off; in addition to that, while any rise in circulation is small and gradual, for the most part, increases in costs are sudden and sharp. There's little point in bewailing the situation, and accusing "villains" largely responsible, as this is not going to change anything; but so long as we remain alive, there may be hope of somehow getting around the difficulties.

*Sylvia J. Oppenheimer* writes from Baltimore, Maryland: "As a regular reader of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, and a fairly regular reader of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, I would like to suggest the following as items to publish in your magazines:

"(1) Manly Wade Wellman's 'John Thunstone' series. (2) More of E. Hoff-

mann Price's 'Pierre d'Artois' stories. (3) A sample of Victor Rousseau's 'Dr. Ivan Brodsky, Surgeon of Souls' series. (4) A sample of Dorothy Quick's stories. (5) More of Nictzin Dyalhis's stories, except the often-reprinted *Sapphire Goddess* and the badly-dated science fiction story, *When the Green Star Waned*. (6) More of Quinn's 'de Grandin' stories, especially that long one, *Satan's Stepson*. (7) More of Keller's 'Taine of San Francisco' stories. (8) The remainder of Ernst's 'Dr. Satan' stories and of Leinster's 'Darkness' stories. (9) More stories in Hoch's 'Simon Ark' series that do not fit into the simple hoax pattern set by *The Man from Nowhere* (SMS #5) and *The Hoofs of Satan* (*Crimes Across the Sea* a Mystery Writers of American anthology). (10) In general, the works of Quinn, E.H. Price, RAWL, M.W. Wellman, R.E. Howard, Victor Rousseau, Edmond Hamilton, C.L. Moore, Stephen King and Stephen Goldin."

You've given me quite a list! Very well, I'll comment on each of your ten points as well as I can. (1) I entirely agree and hope to make arrangements for reprinting some of the 'John Thunstone' stories. (2) Further 'Pierre d'Artois' stories are unavailable to us under present conditions, and I don't believe that Mr. Price is any happier about this than I am. (3) I had planned to run the "Dr. Brodsky" series in *WEIRD TERROR TALES*, and the first of them was not only announced as "coming next issue" in #3, but set up for #4. Alas, due to the disaster which struck us in the summer of 1970, we had to suspend WTT. However, have courage; I hope to run the series later in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. (4) Agreement again; I've been thinking of Miss Quick's stories for some time, and shall look into their availability as soon as possible. (5) This is difficult, as Nictzin Dyalhis had only eight stories published in *WEIRD TALES*. *When the Green Star Waned* and *The Oath of Hul*

*Jok*, which you reject — and I agree; they're fun to read for a kook like me, but I fear that most of our readers would find them unacceptable, as well as awfully long — counts for two; two long, drawn-out, and to my taste poorly written "occult" tales, *The Eternal Conflict* and *The Dark Lore*, makes it four; *The Sapphire Goddess* and *The Sea Witch* are both good, but have been reprinted in soft cover too recently; that makes six. *The Red Witch* appeared in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* #9, January 1968; that leaves one story, *Heart of Atlantan*, which is good. I'll look unto the question of its availability.

(6) I have hopes of presenting *Satan's Stepson* in a future issue of *BIZARRE FANTASY TALES*; it's too long for SMS. (7) I made arrangements with Mrs. Keller to run *The Tree of Evil*, one of the best of the "Taine of San Francisco" stories, before her passing in 1969; further ones will have to be looked in to as to their availability to me. Meanwhile, we shall offer you Paul Spencer's fine pastiche, tentatively entitled, *The Prophet* — I may change the title. Dr. Keller started this story and apparently wrote himself into a corner. Paul read what he had so far, and asked permission to finish it himself, making it a Taine story. It will be interesting to see how many readers are able to detect where the master left off and the worthy apprentice took over. (8) The rest of the stories in the "Dr. Satan" series, and the final story in the "Darkness" series, will follow in due course — meaning that I intend and expect to be able to present them to you. (9) There are few more stories in the "Simon Ark" series which would fit your criterion; unfortunately, Mr. Hoch did not write them in the first place with the thought that they might someday reappear in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, so many of them just do not fit. A lamentable absence of proper clairvoyance on the author's part, but, after all, he was

very busy in those days. (10) You'll see more material by Seabury Quinn, but E. Hoffmann Price is not available; RAWL has little time for writing these days; Wellman, Howard, Rousseau, Hamilton — I'll surely try to get more of them for you (and, of course anything by the first will constitute more, since we can't possibly print less); C.L. Moore is not available to us. Further manuscripts by Stephen Goldin are expected, and further submissions by Stephen King invited. I can say no more.

Edward S. Lauterbach, Associate Professor, writes from Purdue University: "You are, of course, right when you say there are 13 Fu Manchu novels (SMS # 15). However, some Rohmerians like to include *The Golden Scorpion* (1919) with the Fu Manchu stories since the Devil Doctor appears anonymously once in the story and is the power behind the real villain of the book. Furthermore, at least three Fu Manchu short stories appeared during the 1950's in *THIS WEEK* magazine, a supplement which accompanied large Sundays newspapers such as the *LOS ANGELES TIMES*. One of these stories concerned Fu Manchu and a disintegration machine. As far as I know, these short stories have not been collected and put in book form.

"Readers of SMS, MOH, and WTT who like the mysteries of Agatha Christie should also like her stories of the supernatural found in her book titled, *The Hound of Death*, the best of which is the title story. Another fine supernatural tale by Miss Christie is *In a Glass Darkly*. And her stories about Mr. Harley Quin, in *The Mysterious Mr. Quin*, concern a man who, if not exactly a psychic detective, is at least a "spiritual" detective (with every possible connotation given to "spiritual"), and whose sudden appearances and insights are startlingly supernatural.

"Willard Huntington Wright (Philo

Vance — SMS #14) was a specialist in art and aesthetics. The definitive bibliography of works by and about Wright (including the Vance mysteries) is Walter B. Crawford's *Willard Huntington Wright: A Bibliography*, *BULLETIN OF BIBLIOGRAPHY*, XXIV (May-August 1963), 11-16. A list of Philo Vance movies is given by Charles Shibuk, *Dramatizations of Great Literary Detectives and Criminals*, *ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE*, II (April 1969), 193. And more detailed descriptions of some of these Philo Vances movies, by William K. Everson, have also appeared in *ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE*.

"Though Wright did not care for psychic detectives, I do, and I suspect that many other readers of SMS, MOH, and WTT do too. I hope you will print as many tales of psychic detectives as you can find. Uel Key is supposed to have used a psychic investigator in the stories titled, *The Broken Fang and Other Experiences of a Specialist in Spooks* (1920), and Dion Fortune (pseudonym for Violet Mary Firth) wrote about a psychic detective in *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner* (1926).

"Last of all, as marvelous a compilation as Ordean Hagen's *Who Done It?* is, the book contains an unfortunate number of errors. These mistakes are being systematically corrected in current issue of *ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE*, and are an indispensable supplement to Hagen's work."

Many thanks for putting me on the Dr. Taverner. As you'll see in my review in this issue, I share your appreciation of him. . . Interestingly enough, it was a scene from *The Golden Scorpion* (She Is Yours, Master) which was used for years to advertise a set of Sax Rohmer novels. Before reading all the Fu Manchu tales, I assumed that this depicted Karamaneh, but found upon reading the series entire that the scene does not appear there.

Alexander M. Foundoukis writes from

Caldwell, New Jersey: "In issue #15 of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* you mentioned that the automatic pistol loaded with a clip of 'bullets' generally placed in the butt would continue to fire as long as the trigger were held down and the shells lasted. Now as I've learned, the bullet is the missile fired from the shell. The 'bullet' as you termed it is properly called a cartridge, being of the self-contained type consisting of shell, primer powder and bullet. To quote W.H.B. Smith's *Small Arms of the World* (page 198, 1960 edition): 'In 1900, Colt introduced a new model Browning automatic pistol to handle a newly developed cartridge, the .38 Colt automatic. The first model of this arm made by Browning was actually a full automatic enclosed hammer model, a single pull on the trigger emptying the magazine.

" 'The arm fired so rapidly and uncontrollably that it was almost impossible to hit anything with it, the rapid successions of recoil throwing the muzzle up so fast that anyone nearby was in danger.' All this goes to point out the fact that what we refer to today as an automatic pistol is in actuality a semi-automatic pistol requiring a squeeze of the trigger to fire each round, eject the shell, and feed a new cartridge into the chamber ready for firing.

"The final matter I wish to bring to your attention concerns the statement you made that "...there is nothing that we can call an automatic revolver,...". I must tell you that you and the service man of 1930 are both in error. Again we turn to Smith's *Small Arms of the World*, 1960 edition, page 186. At the bottom of the page we see pictured the Webley-Fosbery Automatic Revolver. In the text, (page 187) we read as follows: 'This pattern of revolver is basically the Webley hinged frame type, so designed that the barrel and cylinder assembly can recoil within the grip frame. The revolver must be hand cocked for the first shot. It is hinged open for loading and

extraction as in the standard hinged framed Webley revolver.

"As the Webley-Fosbery fires, the barrel and cylinder assembly recoil in the frame. This causes a stud to act through a zig-zag series of cuts in the cylinder to perform the action of turning the cylinder the distance of the next chamber, and to lock the chamber in line with the barrel upon completion of the return action. The return of the assemblies is brought about by a recoil spring mounted in the grip which stores energy during the recoiling operation. The recoil also causes a barrel extension to cock the hammer ready for the next shot."

This gun was manufactured in England in .38 and .445 calibers and in the U.S.A. in .32 and .38 calibers. Geoffrey Boothroyd in *Guns Through the Ages* mentions that the Webley-Fosbery was first manu-

factured in 1901, and the only similar revolver to the Fosbery was brought out by the Union Arms Co., of Toledo, Ohio, in 1904 and as with its more illustrious parent, enjoyed only a limited success. With these facts in mind I would say that Dettman & Bedford are not in error and as William S. Baring-Gould points out in his excellent biography, *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*, that Holmes retired in late October 1903, this would bring the automatic revolver into the great detective's career."

So at last it's clear to me what in the automatic revolver revolves! Not only did the serviceman misinform me, but my error in respect to firing the semi-automatic came direct from the horse's mouth of an ex-Marine. Well, next time I won't take anyone's unsupported word for it. RAWL

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## The Cleaning Machine

(Continued from Page 57)

dricks knew nothing about electronics. He was a short-order cook in a greasyspoon downtown."

"I figured as much. She probably found everybody gone and went looking for them. She went down to the boiler room as a last resort and, finding *it* deserted, concluded that everybody has been 'cleaned out' of the building. She was glad but wanted to give herself the credit. She saw the circle of clean floor — probably left there by a round table top that had been recently moved — and started fabricating. By now she no doubt believes every word of her fantastic story. We'll never know what really happened until we find those missing tenants."

"I guess not," Burke said as he rose to go, "but I'd still like to know why we can find over a hundred sets of footprints approaching the circle but none leaving it."

Dr. Parker didn't have an answer for that one.



## The Editor's Page

(Continued from Page 7)

Sherlock Holmes realized his true vocation at the time of the *Gloria Scott* episode, when he was attending college. He embraced it eagerly. Wolfe recognized his ability to be an outstanding consulting detective, and realized that it was the simplest way in which he could earn the large sums of money he needed to maintain the style of life he has chosen. Only on rare occasions has he any personal involvement or even personal interest in a case.

It is this lack of interest which makes for the running humor in Archie's accounts, for Goodwin is needed not only to dig up facts for Wolfe and arrange for people to come to see him but also to needle him. Wolfe suffers frequent relapses, and sometimes mutinies outright. A "relapse" refers to a period when Wolfe is reluctant to do any work on a case, but can be pushed into it; "mutiny" is an outright strike — Wolfe pretends he never heard of the case and can't be needled back into it. Not until an event occurs which gives him what he considers he needs in order to continue.

What about the matter of Wolfe's "insensitivity to women", wherein he is supposed to resemble his "father" of Baker Street fame? First of all, we should consider the matter of Sherlock Holmes's attitude towards women. It is not wise to rely

too much upon Watson's comments and opinions; Watson himself was very susceptible to a pretty face and figure, and it is entirely believable that he was not making an empty boast when he claimed experience of women on three continents. To Watson, Holmes's greater interest in mental matters and his occasional denigration of romance and marriage would indeed sound like coldness. Yet, if you examine what Sherlock Holmes actually says and does in the Canon, you will find that he is almost invariably chivalrous and sympathetic to his female clients, and can express praise and admiration. He is more discriminating than Watson, and conceals his feelings — of which he may, indeed, have a smaller quantity in this regard, but certainly which are not entirely absent.

In a similar manner, we should look beyond Archie Goodwin's comments and opinions, for Archie himself (while not so easily infatuated as Watson, perhaps) has an eye for girls. In a number of the cases, Wolfe is much gentler with a female client or visitor than Archie's conclusions about his attitude would lead one to suspect though once only in all the cases I've read does he speak gently to a revealed female culprit. This is a woman who, when exposed, asks Wolfe what mistakes she made and he replies and tells her she made

none, outside of letting him get in to the case. Being probably guilty of three unsavory murders, there is little chance of her reaching natural old age; Wolfe implores her to will her brain to science, and it is clear that he considers her a genius, in his own class. Interestingly enough, *the* woman to Holmes was the adventuress,

Irene Adler. (And we might recall that the closest we see Hercule Poirot coming to a lasting affection for a woman is in his meetings with Countess Rossakoff, who is a very shady lady indeed.) Moreover, Wolfe's characterization of himself as "incurably romantic" and his deliberate cultivation of excess weight suggests that his "dislike" of women is a defensive over-reaction against actual attraction.

While Wolfe does not leave his house often, and seldom in relation to a case, you'll find that he does get out much more frequently than you'd imagine. However, it is a rarity of rarities for him to obtain crucial evidence from first hand observation on the scene of the crime. This does happen, of course, upon at least two major occasions (considering the novels as major, the novelets minor) where he came upon murder while out ( *Some Buried Caesar* and *Too Many Cooks*). In the first of these two cases, he does on-the-spot deductions worthy of his presumed father, and Archie meets his apparent favorite girl, Lily Rowan, at the conclusion of his being chased by a bull.

For the most part, Wolfe uses the "gray cells" method of Hercule Poirot, and we must remember that Poirot himself often distresses people in his cases by his refusal to scurry around, his frequent insistence upon waiting, and his reliance on conversation over tangible clues. While Poirot has to make a little effort to get people to underestimate him (he behaves and talks like a foreigner who does not speak English very well and who is a little bewildered by British customs), Wolfe need only be himself. A man that fat and eccentric just

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doesn't look dangerous. So both Poirot and Wolfe get the people in the case to talk and talk and talk, under circumstances where they gradually feel less and less threatened, until finally someone quite inadvertently gives Wolfe the opening he needs. Sometimes it is a clue to the identity of the culprit; other times it is the pointer toward making a case that the client or the police will accept. At times, in his final confrontations, Wolfe admits he can prove nothing — but the case he builds against one person induces others and the culprit to supply enough for Inspector Cramer.

He is a more cultured person than the Sherlock Holmes that Watson describes to us in *A Study in Scarlet* (Watson's list of deficiencies prove, as time goes along, to have been most erroneous), but he either dislikes or has no interest in music. He is possibly more widely-read than the early Sherlock Holmes, and aside from music can speak knowingly and cogently on a broader variety of subjects; but so far as I've been able to gather, he is an expert on only two; orchids and cooking. Nevertheless, his grasp of grammar and philology is impressive, even if his predilections in respect to usage are sometimes fussy. In a way, I sympathise; I *do* consider it an abomination to make "imply" and "infer" interchangeable, for example. Yet, this is what has actually happened in spoken and written English, so since that is the case, why not say so? I cannot fault a current dicta that such an acknowledgement should take note that this is an abuse and a corruption. As to whether "contact" can legitimately be used as a verb, I pass, as Archie would say; yet it's comforting to know that, whatever any dictionary states, "contact" is *not* a verb under Nero Wolfe's roof.

Archie Goodwin, whose accounts of the cases of Nero Wolfe have been brought to us through the untiring services of the notable author, Rex Stout, is almost as slippery a character as John Watson, M.D.,

and may even exceed his worthy predecessor on these grounds. Like Watson, who wrote competently and entertainingly in a style appropriate to his times, Goodwin gives the impression of candor. He acknowledges various peccadilloes and sometimes states repeatedly that he is suppressing actual names and vocations; shows himself as a master of blarney, and somehow comes out looking like true-blue, Boy Scout innocence and honesty which must, in the course of duty, tell fibs to some people but would never never deceive the readers. (Watson, too, you may recall, acknowledges at times that circumstances require his disguising some items; but as we know from just a fraction of the thousandfold fruits of half a century of Sherlockian studies, Watson is pulling our legs frequently when he is seemingly most open and straightforward.)

What, for example, is the number of Wolfe's house on West 35th Street? Archie gives it as 506 in *Over My Dead Body* (1938); by 1966, he has rung his seventh change upon it in *Death of a Doxy*. I wouldn't hold two changes of the telephone number against him; this could happen and perhaps the exchange shifted those two times, as he says.

But who is Archie Goodwin? His accounts of himself to the various pretty girls he meets in the cases are fascinating, and some of them believable. Wolfe gives us one clue at the end of *A Right to Die*: When the Negro client expresses his regret that Wolfe is not a Negro, Wolfe replies that if he were, then Mr. Goodwin would have to be, too. I won't insult your intelligence by spelling out the implication.

Some Sherlockians regret that Wolfe meets up with a Napoleon of Crime, a present-day parallel to Moriarty; I do not. It is a relief that neither Wolfe nor Archie must go through rains of bullet fire in every case, but the occasional instances of mortal peril to either or both make for in-

## Coming Next Issue

Time...you know, it's strange how time ceases to exist in one of these rooms. Having no windows, the rooms are isolated from day's brightness and night's darkness. Had it not been for my wrist watch I'd have lost all sense of time sitting there by Bertrand's bed, waiting and watching.

I must have dozed off because I remember the room seeming to waver, my vision blurring. There was a dream-like quality to everything; what had awakened me (if indeed I had been asleep) was a voice, almost a whisper, hypnotic in its softness.

"How is my son, Doctor Lineburger?"

A haze seemed to have entered the room and the voice was coming from its center. Gradually my eyes made out the source of that voice: a woman, about five feet ten, one hundred thirty pounds. Long dark hair hung down past her shoulders. Her face was aquiline and her eyes, deep amber, were cat-like and seemed to burn with a radiance all their own, accentuating high cheek bones and a pale complexion. So vivid was the impression left by her features that I recall nothing about her clothes; her face, her eyes held me captive.

"You're his mother?" I asked sluggishly. She seemed much too young to have a son Bertrand's age.

"I am his...mother," she replied, a strange hesitancy coming before the word 'mother'. "Will he live?"

"I don't know. He's lost much blood...."

"Is there a chance he might die...tonight?"

"Yes," I answered, all the while realizing that, as a doctor, I should be cushioning my replies with all sorts of encouragement. Like a man under the influence of sedatives, I was responding mechanically, emotionlessly. With a great effort I managed to rise from the chair and turn toward the door. I felt like a man trying to walk through quicksand; the "mirror" in the door verified my suspicions: my face was flushed and covered with perspiration, as if I were engaged in some strenuous physical exertion. I was a foot from the door when her voice came again. She was so close that I felt a strand of her hair on the nape of my neck.

"You are most likely correct, Doctor Lineburger, in your assumption that the loss of blood is the critical factor; however, George shall not ... die."

*What was the eerie riddle behind the monstrosity of*

## THE FULL-MOON MANIAC

by David Charles Paskow

terest as well as credibility. Wolfe's most dangerous hour starts when he decides that the time has come when he must move against Arnold Zeck (Mr. X) directly. It is what he does in this case which makes his adventures in *The Black Mountain*, four years later, believable. He has then regained all the weight he took off in 1950, and returned to his self-indulgent way of life; but if we ever thought so before the conclusion of the Zeck affair, we know now that Nero Wolfe is not soft. He suffers much in Montenegro, but his firmness of will has been established beyond cavil. Anyway, as he has told Archie, he has grown gross to insulate himself against his feelings. If drastic measures had not been taken, he would have met a most romantic death before he became a detective. You may or may not approve, but this is understandable, at least.

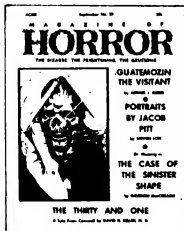
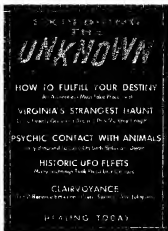
Like Sherlock Holmes, Nero Wolfe's relationship with the police is ambivalent at the very best. Inspector Cramer and the others down at the precinct resent Wolfe's existence as a private detective; they resent his success more — even though he is entirely willing to let them take the credit, quite often. He needs some glory for advertising purposes but seems to care very little about it otherwise, so far as solving mysteries goes. It's his reputation as an orchid grower and a cook that he really takes pride in. (And I wish Archie would tell us exactly *how* Wolfe cooks his famous 45-minute omelet!)

That indefatigable Sherlockian, Savoyard, Cabellian, and Joycean, William D. Jenkins, wonders how I could read through most of the 31 novels and a dozen novelets in order to do this essay. And some of you, the readers, wonder how I do it, too. Well, first of all, I give myself ample time, and such reading is not my only reading during the period. Second, and perhaps more important, I went back to these detectives partly to see *if* they could hold up under such accelerated reading

Had I begun to find any of them boring (making full allowances for the fact that such reading intensifies repetitions which would not be so apparent were it to be spread out over a period of years), I would have stopped short of completion and either covered this particular character cursorily, or not at all. And the crucial test was, of course, the re-readings — some of them a third time.

The Nero Wolfe stories are closer to the Sherlock Holmes tales than the Poirot adventures in that the reader often has little or no chance to solve the mystery in advance of the final revelation. But in more than half of the novels, I'd say that Archie gives the alert reader a fair chance. And when he does not, it is sometimes because Wolfe himself was baffled and furiously frustrated right up to the end. The crucial clue he needed just hadn't turned up, and Wolfe wastes neither time nor energy in what he considers fruitless speculation. Unlike some lesser detectives in fiction Wolfe feels no need to impress Archie with brilliant but premature speculations; and, in fact, he knows Archie well enough to realize that his able assistant would not be impressed at all. Nor would anyone who could be impressed by such flummery be of any value to Wolfe as a leg man and reporter.

Archie is the reporter and observer superb. He remembers everything and can repeat long conversations verbatim (he says), and from all the other internal evidence, I'm inclined to believe him. It's on the basis of his very first report over the phone in *In The Best Families* that Wolfe knows who killed Mrs. Barry Rackham, and why. And it is the motive for the murder that sends him out of West 35th Street to start his several-months campaign against Arnold Zeck. I wonder how many readers spotted this revelation when it happened, for it was right there in Archie's account, which he relayed to Wolfe later. After Zeck is finished, Wolfe then clears



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up the murder. (The reader who missed it is offered the comfort of knowing that I missed it, too.)

For me, the fascination of the Nero Wolfe stories, in addition to Archie's wry humor and his accounts of the way he and his employer needle each other (some day, one of the two will go too far and the relationship will be broken permanently — there has already been one temporary break — but it hasn't yet; that is my guess), is in the sharp portraits of the people with whom Archie and Wolfe come in contact. There's a sparkle in Archie's style that makes for delightful reading, without his ever becoming precious or pretentious. He writes the way he talks, which means that his English, while far from abomination, is not of Wolfe's quality. But it is vivid, without drawing attention to itself so insistently that it becomes tedious.

Rex Stout was obviously influenced by the hard-boiled school of detective story writing, which flourished in the 20's, through *BLACK MASK* magazine, I am told. I can admire the school briefly as portrayed in Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man*, the way one admires any efficient and competent product; but I've never liked it, even when employed for an honest puzzle-type murder mystery, rather than a tedious prolonged orgy of blood and sordidness, without any mystery worth solving at all — except the mystery of why apparently intelligent people could enjoy it so much. But Mr. Stout seems to have taken the best aspects of this school of writing — the wit, the wryness, the sardonism, etc., and left the worst behind. What I think of as "cheap pulp crime story" elements appear rarely in the Nero Wolfe stories, and are effective precisely because they are rare and appear only at the right times. It isn't the boring straightforward attempt at realism that the hard-boiled school delivers, but a style that moves along, without leaving better things than crime behind, and produces a realis-

tic effect. I have yet to encounter an unbelievable character in these stories, bizarre as some of them may be.

If you find Wolfe interesting, but do not have all of the stories (or even if you do), you'll find a thorough study of Wolfe and Goodwin in Baring-Gould's book; you'll also find fascinating fragments of Wolfe's philosophy, which is sprinkled among the stories. Whether you will end up liking Nero Wolfe is something I cannot predict; I'm not entirely sure I do myself — but I certainly find him fascinating, and if I do dislike him the dislike is only moderate, and by no means a matter of revulsion.

His view of the law is closer to that of Sherlock Holmes than that of Hercule Poirot. I do not recall any Poirot story in which the Belgian detective undertakes private retribution upon a culprit or is indifferent as to whether the guilty person is convicted or not. Even in *Murder in the Calais Coach*: the reason why Poirot proposes an alternate solution to the crime, for "official" purposes is not in order that the guilty person may evade prosecution for a homicide that Poirot has to admit has some justification; it is because it is impossible to determine, under the circumstances, just who actually killed the victim. But Poirot is an ex-policeman, and he considers it part of his duty to himself and civilization to uphold the law, while Wolfe considers it his duty only to obey it at the most. I'm not sure, either, that he has Poirot's passion for learning the truth.

Wolfe has, at times, taken cases when money was not the primary consideration, while Poirot has come into many simply because he wanted to *know*. Poirot is dissatisfied when he has solved the mystery behind *Peril at End House*, until he learns why an art dealer offered fifty pounds for a picture that was obviously worth little more than twenty.

Wolfe is altogether more interesting a person than Father Brown or Philo Vance. Add up his phobias — exercise, any sort of

## Subscription And Back Issue Order Page

We hope we are not putting you off by what seems to be a continual cry of "Wolf!", but the fact is that our supply of some issues of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* is pretty low. Right now, we have all back issues, but the time is coming when one, then another, will go out of print; that will be it! And the orders *are* coming in constantly. P.S. The price is going up!



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vehicular travel, etc. — and it seems impossible that he ever could accomplish anything when any of them were crossed. But there is a will as massive as that massive body; no, more so — as Arnold Zeck learns a little too late.

Mr. Rex Stout has declined either to confirm or deny Mr. Baring-Gould's deduction that Nero Wolfe is the son of Sherlock Holmes, either by Irene Adler or any other woman. It may be that this amiable agent, one of the finest since the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself, actually does not know. However, there have been indications that he does, and is sworn to silence.

One interesting difference in the Sherlock Holmes stories and the Nero Wolfe tales is that Holmes is fully aware (and despite some sardonic comments, not entirely displeased) that Watson is recording some of the cases — and, in fact, Holmes at times has suggestions to Watson about a particular case if he decides to write it up — where I do not recall any indication in the Wolfe series that Nero Wolfe knows Archie is writing novels and novelets about him. But perhaps the agent suggested to Archie that this element be omitted, in order to avoid the appearance of imitation.

Baring-Gould's fascinating book on Nero Wolfe is not a biography in the sense that *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street* is, but then, since Mr. Wolfe's career, or at least the published records of his cases, has not yet drawn to a close, this was not the way to approach him. We cannot see his career as a whole, as we can the Master's.

Is he the son of Sherlock Holmes? Some Sherlockians find the suggestion offensive, and I can see reason for this, even aside from the fact that (according to Baring-Gould in the earlier book) there was no marriage. Brilliant and entertaining as Wolfe is, as profound as some of his philosophical comments may be (Gould has a generous collection of excerpts),

Wolfe just isn't the man his presumptive father was. This may be, of course, because we do not see him through the admiring (and almost adoring) eyes of a Watson, but of the rather flippant Archie. It isn't just the matter of an honest portrait, warts and all; the foibles and absurdities are constantly thrust before our eyes either for laughs or to pinpoint Archie's often-justified irritation. But the end result of this is that Nero Wolfe comes out interesting, and only occasionally likeable or admirable, rather than lovable. It is possible to read Baring Gould's biography of Holmes and finish it with somewhat moist eyes. But how would an account of the retirement or demise of Nero Wolfe strike me? I cannot answer that with any feeling of surety, for sometimes I do feel that there is a noble heart buried beneath the protective layers of fat. It was a true *beau geste* that he made in *The Silent Speaker*, as hilarious as the episode is on the surface; and he makes another in *Death of a Dude*.

He lacks a true Boswell, for when Sherlock Holmes refers to Watson as "my Boswell", Holmes is not just making a pretty compliment. Watson writes about Holmes with the same admiring magic that Boswell employs to write about Dr. Samuel Johnson; and it is just as easy to fall into the error of supposing that Dr. Watson never criticizes or finds any fault in Sherlock Holmes as it is to assume that James Boswell never disagreed with or found any fault in the Great Cham. Yet for how many thousands of readers is the portrait of Johnson drawn by Boswell, or the portrait of Holmes drawn by Watson, so firmly set that no discovery proving gross error in either could efface or alter the original impressions?

So perhaps there is much more to Nero Wolfe than the negative aspects of Archie's generally entertaining and positive manner of presentation allows us to perceive easily. This is what I hope, anyway.

RAWL

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